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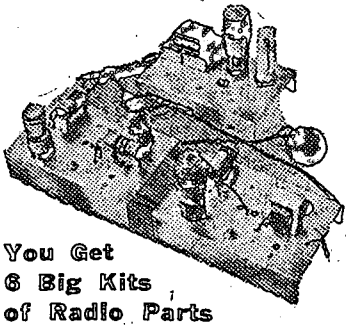

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn illustrating a scene from "Diamond of Doom"
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul illustrating "Stories of the Stars".

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Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE readers of this magazine will be saddened by the news that one of their best liked authors has been killed in action. David Wright O'Brien, bombardier on a flying fortress, was killed over Germany on December 11, 1944. He was one of two men in the plane who were unable to parachute to safety.

The loss of O'Brien means a great deal more to us than this news implies, for now it can be revealed that he made several other names popular in this and other magazines. He was also John York Cabot, Duncan Farnsworth, Clee Garson, Bruce Dennis, Richard Vardon, and others. This in itself will astound our readers, because it is a well-known fact that each of these names appeared as the byline on enough fiction to represent the output of any ordinary writer.

But Dave was no ordinary writer. He wrote and sold as much as 50,000 words monthly, all of a very high caliber. He was the only writer for the Ziff-Davis magazines who was able to continue writing after his entry into the air force and wrote 150,000 words in little over a year, most of it under the most trying circumstances. Several manuscripts were actually written in the air!

Your editor misses him personally, most of all because for many years we, together with William P. McGivern, were pals in every way, including escapades that make us blush to remember. It was the hardest job of our career to notify McGivern, lying in a hospital in Italy from wounds suffered in the terrific mountain action in that country, of the death of the one man he loved most. Your editor can testify to a friendship between the two that he has never seen equalled. They were raised together, went to school together, and later, wrote together, in the same Chicago downtown office.

Dave's last letter to us warned us very solemnly that the war was far from over, and he spoke of the hell he was in with such emphasis as we have never known him to use. He knew something we do not, and he gave his life because he knew. Perhaps we'll never realize just how much we owe to him and to all those others of his buddies who have made the supreme sacrifice.

"I spell my name with two t's."

OUR cover story this month, written by Alexander Blade around a cover painted by Arnold Kohn, is "Diamond of Doom" and we believe we have here a fantastic action story that will keep you on the edge of your chair until you finish the last breathless line. It is a story of ancient Mexico, all tied up with modern Mexico; but we can assure you that much of the material background for the story is authentic. You will enjoy this ably-conceived novel.

THE readers will forgive us, we know, for presenting one more story based on the war. It is "The Tiger Has a Soul" by Lester Barclay. Here is one of those weird fantasies which leaves us with a feeling in the pit of our stomachs. There are many unknown things in life similar to this, and therefore the basis of this story is convincing. Lester Barclay has taken a war background of convincing reality, and woven into it a thread of fantasy that makes it something very unusual.

J. J. ALLERTON got a tough assignment from us. We had a story in our files which we discovered in time was plagarized. So we had to junk the manuscript, and found ourselves with a perfectly good illustration, already in plate form. We asked Mr. Allerton to do a story around it which *wasn't* something we'd read before. We hardly expected him to come through so nobly, but he did. You'd have expected some similarity if he followed the illustration closely, but we were amazed at the difference. We think you'll like "Dr. Zanger's Cats."

(Concluded on page 8)

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Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON has a reputation for taking "under-the-L" characters and making them top-notch fantasy characters. Well he's done a glittering job along those lines on "'It's Raining Dimes," a fantasy that will delight you, and which you'll put in your file of "worth remembering." It has that eerie touch of mysticism and beauty that makes a good fantasy what it should be. And yet it is based on sheer reality. The "L" wreck mentioned actually happened in Chicago some years ago, and is remembered by Chicagoans with shudders even today. The story amplifies those shudders.

A GRAVE is nothing to laugh about, but you'll have no other choice when you read "A Grave for Gullible" by B. E. Liston. You see, there was already an occupant in this grave, and Gullible found out there would be trouble in evicting the tenant from his property! But Gullible had bought a grave and he wasn't going to be cheated out of it. What happened when he met the "ghost" will have you rolling in the aisles.

"WHAT'S New?" asks E. E. Pelletier, and proceeds to present something new. A couple of gangsters find a marvelous hideout, but then they disappear. It seems the hideout was *perfect*, because they never came back again. At least, not so their mothers would recognize them!

MAGARIAN has been absent from our magazine so long that you have no doubt begun to forget one of the most painstaking artists our magazine has ever presented. Therefore, you'll be glad to see the illustration for "The Lotus Temple," second of Berkeley Livingston's stories to be presented in this issue. Sometimes we get two stories by an author which are so good we can't wait to publish them in separate issues, so we break all the rules (which our readers have agreed we ought to break when it means a special treat!) and put him into the issue twice. We know you'll like this combination of a very swell illustration and a very swell story.

OUR back cover this month is by artist Frank R. Paul, the old master of science fiction and fantasy. It is one of his series, "Stories of the Stars," and depicts a world in Gemini, with four suns in its sky. A weird world indeed, you'll say! Imagine four suns in our sky!

HAVE you been reading our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories?* The latest issue contains a fantastic story of cities under the ground, wherein the descendants of an ancient race of Lemuria still live, tormenting the people of the surface world with weird rays. We don't ask you to believe, but we do suggest you read the stories. They will interest you, since they bear much resemblance to A. Merritt's stories of the underworld; remember his "Snake Mother"? It is very true in some respects, says author Richard S. Shaver.

COMING next issue is one of the most fascinating book-length novels we have ever presented. It is called "King of the Dinosaurs" and it is written by J. W. Pelkie, a name that will be new to you, but one you'll be seeing often if we have anything to do with it. This novel, which is 75,000 words long, is the finest thing that has come to our pages since Burroughs created Tarzan. It has thousands of thrills, is excellently written, and is absolutely new in concept. Here is a fantasy written in the style of Walt Disney's "Fantasia." You'll be the sorriest fantasy reader alive if you miss the next issue!

JOSEPH MILLARD, author of "The Earthquake Girl," a very popular story back when FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was a pup, dropped into our office the other day. He has given up writing comics and pulp fiction and is now concentrating on the slicks. He has been going a grand job of serializing stories that have appeared in the movies. He informed us that he was selling his farm in Pennsylvania, having had enough of being a gentleman farmer. Well, good luck Joe, on your new ambitions. We think you've got the stuff it takes to hit the top rung of the literary ladder. We'll be reading you there.

AMONG other recent visitors was Arthur T. Harris, out of the hospital after an operation in Brazil, and now on his way back into active participation in the war once more. James Norman, creator of "Oscar," the Martian detective, so popular with you readers, also dropped in, an imposing figure in his uniform, and cloaked with so much modesty he fooled us into believing he hadn't yet had anything to do with the actual fighting—until we heard him over the radio the following Sunday, very obviously a terrific hero of the Pacific area, and possessor of wounds and medals from here to there.

AUGUST DERLETH has written an ending to a novel begun by H. P. Lovecraft, called "Lurker at the Threshold," which is "caviar" to the lover of weird fiction. We understand it is to appear in book form, and we expect it to be a hit if our reading of it is any indication. However, we found it unsuitable to our pages, and had to admit it was heavy, adult reading, even for us. But we pass on the news of the completion of this novel to you avid fans who make a study of the weird fantastic. And so, until next issue, take up that matter of buying more war bonds! *Rap.*

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To People Who Want to Write

but can't get started

Beginner Earns $1,819.00

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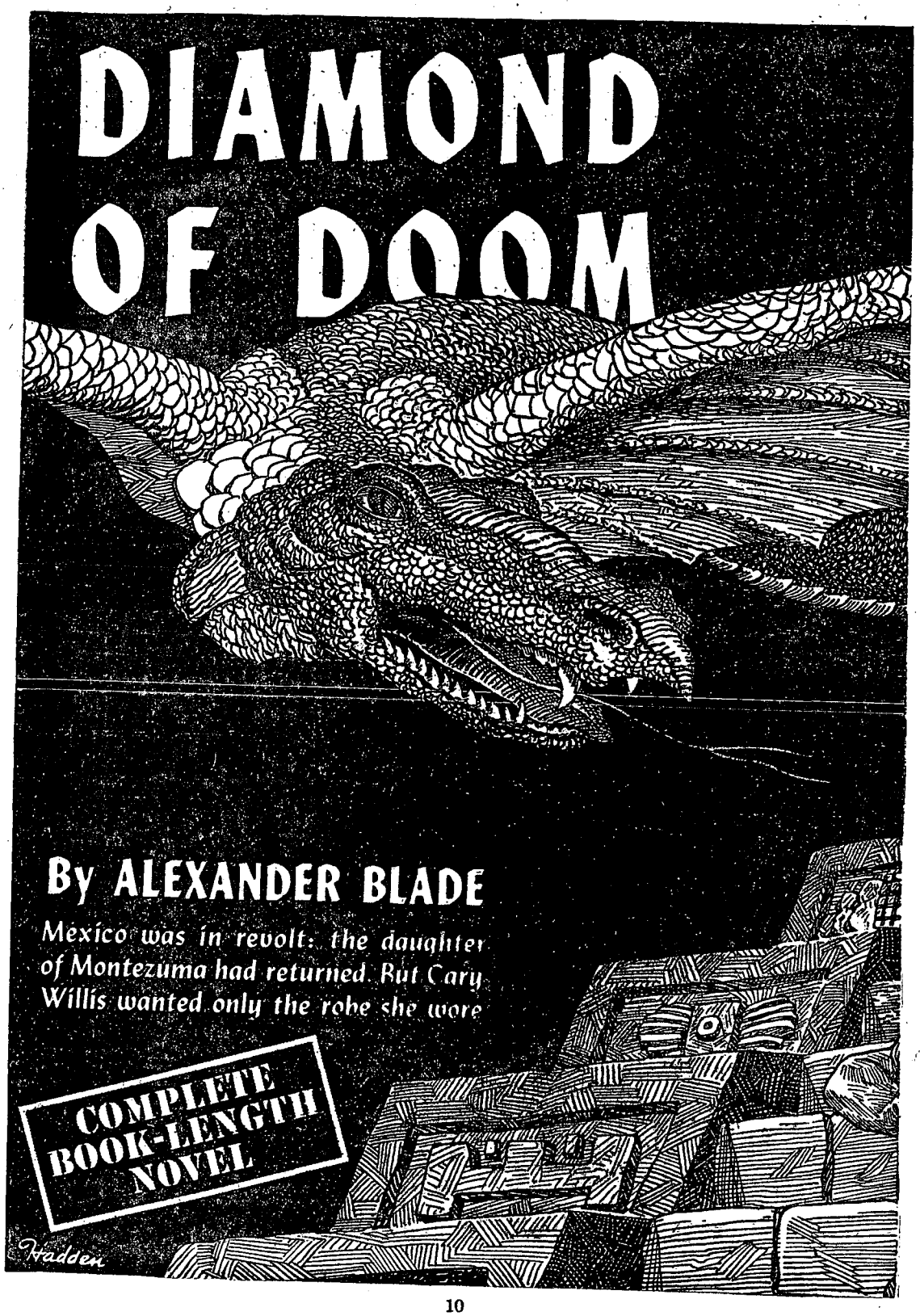

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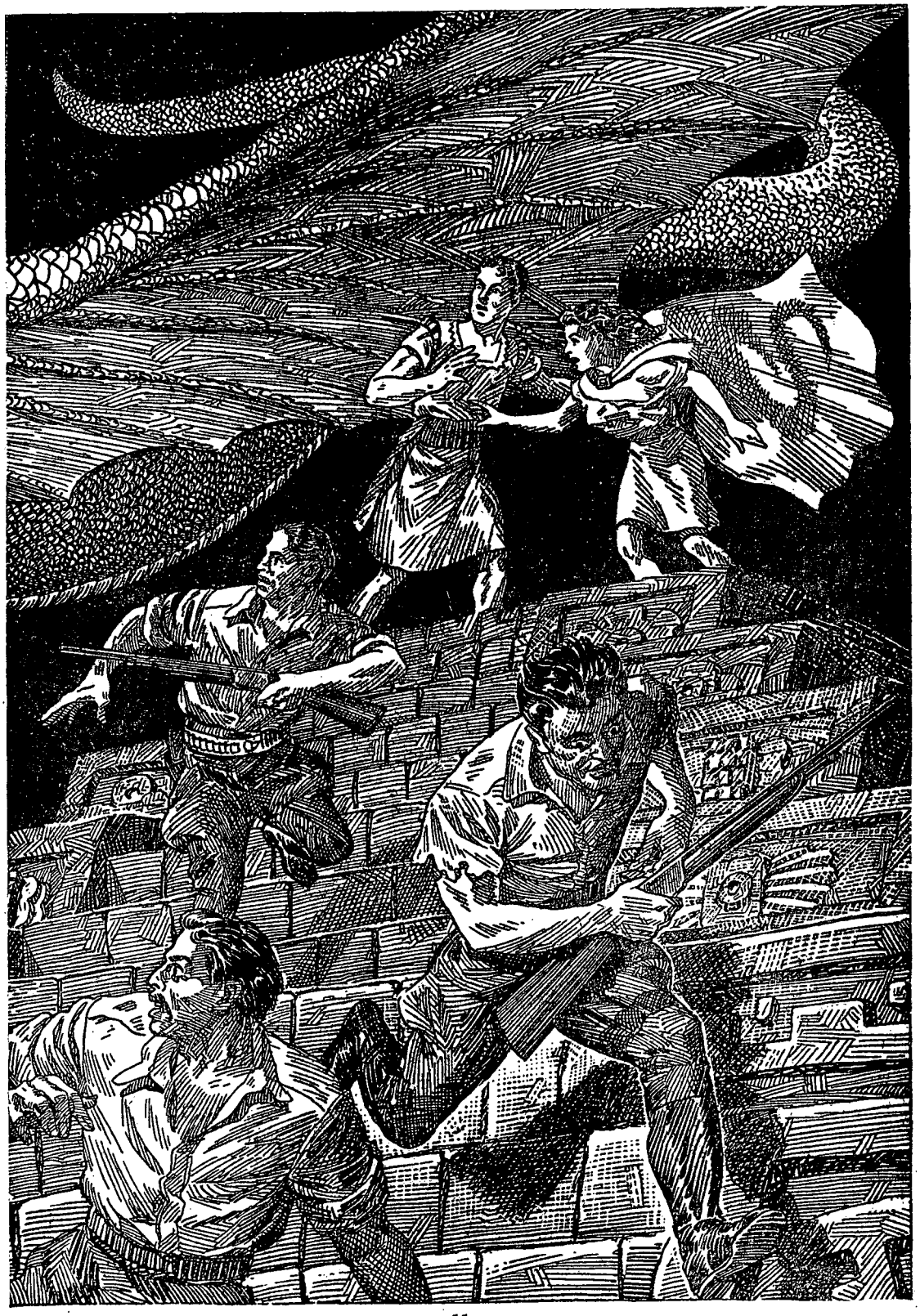

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CHAPTER I

"GRAYBEARD loons."

It was that odd phrase which came to Cary Willis' mind just then. Yet it fitted perfectly the four men gathered about his desk.

There wasn't one among them who was less than sixty, and all chattered like magpies over a suddenly discovered bit of food. More, when they weren't screeching at him, they were arguing among themselves.

The man behind the desk held up his hand and said in a voice which rose above theirs:

"Gentlemen, please! You—" he stabbed a finger at one of them—"suppose you tell me what this is all about."

The one who had been pointed out, sent a look of triumph toward the others and said:

"We, sir, are the board of directors of the Kincaid Museum. We have discovered that a fraud has been perpetrated upon the Museum."

He sent a look of indignation at the man behind the desk, as if he held him directly responsible for it.

"Well?"

The word was a burning fuse to the dynamite of their emotions. There was a burst of explosive at his question.

"Gentlemen!"

Slowly they quieted, as if reluctant to listen to a voice other than their own.

"This isn't getting any of us anywhere. I don't know who you are or why you are *here*. So please! Try to control yourselves. I'm sure we can get to the point, without all this commotion."

The designated spokesman offered an apology and the man behind the desk grinned an acceptance. The grin gave to the rather austere face a look of charming youthfulness. The spokesman continued in more moderate tones:

"As I said, fraud has been perpetrated upon the Museum. Two weeks ago, Philemon Smith died. Probably the greatest archeologist this world has ever known, he was a man to whom was given the greatest honors. . . .

"Imagine our horror when we discovered that the robe of Ixanthlu was missing!"

It was all very mystifying, but the man behind the desk realized that the story would have to be told in the rambling fashion of this old man and that there was nothing he could do about it.

"Of course when the caretaker who was in charge of the Mexican section made the discovery, we *knew* the identity of the—thief." He had hesitated over that last word. Then realizing that the die was cast, he continued, in more subdued tones:

"Several years ago, Smith headed an expedition into Mexico, the purpose of which was to investigate the ruins of an ancient city which was of Aztec origin. I won't go to any lengths describing his finds. But he brought back with him the robe of Ixanthlu. This almost legendary robe was supposed to have been worn by Ixanthlu, the daughter of Montezuma, the ruler of the Aztecs.

"We knew of its existence through the intricate picture writings of the Aztecs. But, up to the time of Smith's expedition, it was only a legend. There was no question about it. It was authentic in every detail, to the very center stone, a two inch emerald, with its intaglio of the 'feathered serpent.'"

"A two inch emerald!" Cary Willis ejaculated.

THE spokesman started in annoyance at the sudden interruption.

"Yes!" he answered shortly. . . . "The point is this. That Smith was the

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only one who had access to the exhibit. And so when we made the discovery of the loss, we knew where to look."

"And?"

"As I said," the other went on, "Smith died two weeks ago, leaving as sole heir to his property, his daughter, Jane. Well, when we made inquiry as to her whereabouts . . ."

"I get it," Willis said. "She had vamoosed. Robe and all."

"Yes. And that is why we have come to you. We are cognizant of the service you performed for the Mannel Museum of New York. You have been most highly recommended to us, Mr. Willis. Not alone for your abilities as an investigator, but also—and this is of the utmost importance—for your discretion.

"The intrinsic value of the robe is great. Perhaps several hundred thousand dollars. But as a museum piece it has an even greater value. The robe must be found and returned. You may tell Miss Smith that she will not be prosecuted if she returns the property without question. And as a sign of our good faith, will this suffice as a retainer?"

Willis looked at the thin sheaf of greenbacks which the other had taken from an inside pocket and thrown upon the desk. Then he picked up the packet and ran his fingers through it. There were twenty hundred-dollar bills in the packet.

"It'll do," Willis said through pursed lips. "Tell me, why didn't you go to the police?"

"Because we thought the attendant notoriety would do the Museum no good."

"Fair enough . . . Whom do I notify, when I get this Smith girl?"

"We are not interested in the girl," said the old gentleman in reminder. "We want the *robe*. My name is Lorenz. Doctor Lorenz. You can reach me at the Museum's address."

Willis nodded at the information. And as though it was a signal for their departure, the four started for the door. Lorenz turned as he was crossing the threshold and said:

"There will be five thousand more, on receipt of the robe."

CHAPTER II

CARY WILLIS looked up at the red sandstone house and whistled soundlessly. This Rush Street address was the last known of the Smiths. He trotted up the wide old-fashioned stairway and rang the bell at the side of the single door.

It creaked slowly open, as though it too were showing signs of age, and Willis saw a narrow expanse of red-carpeted hallway and a curving stairway. A light glowed dimly in an old-fashioned fixture.

"Well?" querried a thin high voice.

He took in the sharp pinched features of the woman who had answered the bell. Noticed the graying hair, drawn back in a tight bun against the nape, then he brought his eyes back to the suspicious ones regarding him.

"I am looking for a Mr. Smith," he began. "A Mr. Philemon Smith."

She tittered at the request. A high sharp sound. It gave him a start.

"Wrong place, mister. Glenview Cemetery is your best bet."

Again the unnerving sound. Willis wished she wouldn't do that. His voice took on a plaintive note:

"You mean he's dead?" And I've travelled a thousand miles . . ."

She rose to the bait.

"Y' don't say . . . Well, come in. Night air gives me the chills."

"Yep," she continued, as she marched ahead of him, past the stairwell and into

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a room at the end of the hall. "Died about two weeks ago. Sit, mister." She indicated the somewhat dubious comfort of a rickety sofa. And when he had carefully lowered himself onto it, she went on:

"Left a daughter and a trunk full of old junk. Paid up, though, to the last day."

"A daughter?"

"Yep." She sniffed loudly, as if the fact disturbed her sense of propriety. "Packed up and left, day after the funeral."

Willis sighed despondently. The woman's eyes gleamed in unrestrained curiosity at the sound. "Something wrong?"

"Ah!" Willis sighed again. "If I'd only known. But . . ." His fingers stroked his chin reflectively. "I wonder . . . You see, I came here on a matter of the utmost importance. Here—" He pulled a card case from his breast pocket and offered one to her.

She took it and read aloud the message it bore:

"Arthur Leftwinger, investigator. Ames Casualty Co."

"You see, er . . ."

"Crombie," she said.

". . . Miss Crombie." She colored with pleasure at the word "Miss". "Mr. Smith and his daughter are the heirs to a considerable amount of money. It is of the utmost urgency that I find Miss Smith."

"Well," the woman said, "like I said: she moved the day after the funeral. Guess I ain't going to be much help."

"Didn't she leave a forwarding address?" he asked, somewhat sharply.

"Nope. Not even a good-by."

"Miss Crombie," he said, "would you do me a favor?"

The ten-dollar bill which had suddenly appeared in his palm, may have had a lot to do with her quick agreement. For when he added: "May I see her room?" she walked past him and, taking the bill from his hand, said:

"Follow me."

WILLIS looked curiously about him. It was a narrow, high-ceilinged room. A large bed was pushed against one wall. Two windows, wide-curving, took up another wall and against the third was a wash-stand and an in-a-door clothes closet.

"The old man lived across the hall," said the woman, gesturing with a thumb.

The door bell rang just then. "Be back in minute," she added, scurrying from the room.

Willis waited until the floor stopped its creaking, then moved swiftly to the closet. It was empty. As he turned away from it his eyes caught sight of a bit of paper on the floor. He had barely placed it in his pocket, when Miss Crombie appeared in the doorway again.

"Find anything?" she asked.

He shook his head dolefully.

"Well," he sighed r e g r e t f u l l y. "Guess I'll have to report the girl missing."

She made a clucking sound. And as he went down the outside stairs, he could still hear that sound.

WILLIS perched his feet on the top of the battered desk and stared with somber eyes at the scrap of paper in his fingers.

The words on the paper read:

"—wise Steamship Corp."

There was no address.

Two down and five to go, he thought with amusement. You are discreet, Mister Willis, they had said, with punctillious politeness. And tell the girl we will not prosecute. Our precious emarald! It's only worth a couple hundred

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grand!

Nuts! Who did they think they were kidding? With that engraving on it, they'd be lucky to get five hundred. So what's the angle?

He had spent a profitable morning and afternoon at the Kincaid Museum and later at the Public Library. It was amazing, the amount of literature on Mexico and the Aztecs. And the Mexicana section of the museum took up an entire floor.

"The largest and most complete in the whole world," the gray-uniformed guide had said.

"How do you mean . . . complete?" Willis asked.

"If you'll notice, sir, each exhibit is complete in itself. Costumes, utensils of the home, ceremonial dress, articles of worship—everything."

"I see," Willis had said to that. "I heard that you people had the robe of Ixanthlu. Is that right?"

The guide's eyes glowed. Here was a fellow traveler!

"Yes sir!" he exclaimed. "This way."

He hadn't noticed that Willis had used the past tense.

The exhibit was in a far corner. Each figure was labeled. One was Montezuma. Another was Cortez. But the one Willis was interested in was the small dark representation of Ixanthlu, Montezuma's daughter . . . and in the robe she was wearing.

"Silly looking affair," was Willis' first thought. Then he asked if the precious stones around the waist of the garment were real.

"Oh, no sir!" The guide was emphatic. "We couldn't take that risk, sir. but we do have the original robe in the museum vault."

Willis' face wore a thoughtful expression as he left the museum. Nor did it change during the walk to the office.

Now he sat and speculated on the case presented him.

There was a knock on the door, interrupting his thoughts. He shoved the scrap of paper in his pocket before answering.

WILLIS looked with open curiosity at the person who had entered at his command. The stranger returned the look with equal interest.

"Yes?" Willis said softly.

The stranger smiled, showing large white teeth beneath the sweeping waxed points of his moustache.

"Have I the honor of addressing, Cary Willis?" he asked.

"Right."

"Ah!" the stranger sighed. "May I be seated?"

He didn't wait for an invitation but pulled up a chair and sat down. He remained silent for a moment. His eyes, brown in color, were piercing in their look. Tiny flecks of gold seemed to swim in the irises.

"Well," said Willis, breaking the silence, "think I'll pass?"

Again the flashing smile.

"But of course," said the stranger. Then slender fingers dipped within the confines of a jacket pocket and brought out a long narrow manila folder. It was sealed with a bright daub of red wax. The stranger broke the wax and after blowing the envelope open, removed several greenbacks from it. He spread them wide before Willis, as though they were the cards in a poker hand.

They were five one thousand dollar bills.

Willis looked sharply at the money, then up into the amused, olive-brown countenance of the man who had so carelessly dropped the small fortune on the desk.

"What's that for?" Willis asked.

"But for you, of course," the other said.

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"For me? How nice. And just how many guys am I supposed to knock off for that amount?" Willis' voice held a sarcasm that was completely lost on the other. The smile persisted. In fact, it grew larger as he said:

"Forgive me. I mystify you. But first, let me introduce myself." Again the slender fingers dipped into a pocket. He thrust the card which he pulled out, at Willis.

The card read:

"Hernando Arrelia D' Cordoba Corta."

Willis' lips pursed in appreciation of the imposing title.

"Ve-ery interesting, Mr. Corta," he said. "Of course this tells all. It explains everything—in a cocked hat it does! Now will you get down to business and forget this hokus-pokus. I'm a busy man."

Corta's voice was oilly smooth: "I am truly sorry! We Latins are of a different temperament. But to business, as you Americans say. Mr. Willis, I want to hire your services. The money, there, represents my retainer. A like sum will be deposited to your account at the completion of your task."

"Go on," Willis said as the other paused.

"I want you to locate a certain girl. I will furnish you with all the necessary descriptive matter and background. When you have found this girl, you will communicate with me. That is all I require of you."

A WHISTLE of surprise escaped Willis. Ten grand, just to find some dame! The very simplicity of the request stunned him and set aflame the suspicion that was part of his nature.

"Wait a minute," he said slowly. "Let's get this straight. You want me to find some dame for you and when I do, all I've got to do is let you know and I get five thousand more."

"You are entirely correct."

"Mister," Willis said, "even if I weren't a private eye but just some goof from off the street, I'd say your proposition smelled. What's more . . ."

"The name of the girl," said Corta, who seemed to find Willis' attitude amusing, "is—Jane Smith."

" . . . I don't know why I shouldn't take it," Willis said slowly. There was a reflective gleam in his eyes. "After all, ten grand is something one doesn't pick up every day in the week. But why pick on me as the beneficiary?"

"Believe me, Willis, you weren't selected from the depths of a hat. You were *chosen* for this particular—ah—mission. I had made it a point to inquire into your capabilities.

"I find in your dossier—" he had taken a paper from his pocket and was reading from it—"that you were engaged to solve the disappearance of some pearls a few months ago. You recovered them. During the course of your investigation, one Monk Shannon disappeared.

"Again, for the Mannel Museum of New York, you . . ."

"I can see," Willis interrupted, "that you've got my whole record there. Including the various people who had a habit of disappearing if they got in my way. Uh—aren't you afraid that I might take it into my head to . . ."

Corta shrugged his shoulders.

Willis understood. Corta didn't care one way or the other. He decided to keep quiet. Jane Smith again. What did this queer bird want with her?

As though having read his mind, Corta said:

"I have noticed an important factor in all your activities. Your love of money. You see, Willis, I am perfectly open with you. Now, when you find Miss Smith, if you can *persuade* her to

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accompany you to Mexico City, *ten* thousand in cash will be waiting your arrival."

"It's a deal!" Willis said. "Now, you said something a while ago about identification . . ."

"In a moment," Corta said holding up his hand. "When you arrive in Mexico City, you and the girl will proceed to—mark this number down please—110 Paseo de la Reforma Boulevard."

He waited until Willis had done as directed, then continued:

"Now, to describe Miss Smith. She is . . ."

"A GORGEOUS hunk of stuff," said Cary Willis to himself as he read again the description Corta had furnished of the girl.

He looked again at the photograph of the girl. It was colored to give a life-like effect. A small oval face, framed in hair so black it seemed blue. Dark eyes returned his look impassively. The softly curving mouth was parted slightly, showing white teeth in an even line.

Altogether, it was the most charming face Willis had ever seen. It was a sigh almost of regret that he put the picture away. He looked at his wristwatch and whistled at the time it showed. The evening had gone quickly. He switched the light out and left the office.

He bought a paper at the corner news-stand and took the bus which would leave him off the few steps from his apartment hotel. Then, going to the upper deck, he found a seat and opened the paper. The headline told of a mystery slaying on the Near North Side. He lit a cigarette and turned to the sports section.

. . . While one hand was pulling the key from the keyhole the other groped for and found the light switch.

Two men arose from the depth of the sofa at the far side of the room. He didn't have to hear one of them say: "Lieutenant Barnes wants to see you, Willis," to know they were from Police Headquarters.

CHAPTER III

LIEUTENANT George Barnes, head of the Homicide detail, did not look like the Hollywood version of a detective. Nor, as a matter of strict fact, did he look like a detective at all. Barnes could have served as a model of every man's version of a Communist.

Intense was the word for Barnes. But Willis knew that exterior was a facade behind which was a shrewd and sensitive nature. Barnes was nobody's fool.

Barnes came to the point immediately:

"You were up to see a Miss Harriette Crombie early this evening."

It was a statement, not a question.

Willis did not answer immediately. First he pulled up the only chair in the room other than the lieutenant's, and sprawled in its leather seat, his long legs thrust out before him.

Barnes took a card from the desk top and read aloud:

"Arthur Leftwinger, investigator. Ames Casualty Co."

Willis grinned amiably and said:

"Who dat, boss?"

"Dat you," Barnes said in hostile mimicry. "And it was found in the apron of the late Miss Crombie."

Willis stopped grinning and sat straighter in the chair.

Barnes tossed the card back on the desk and said:

"Before I go into this matter, Willis, I want to get something straight between us. I know all about you. That you're a rough, tough character. And that you always deliver the goods. The department is still curous about certain

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gentlemen who departed this earth in rather unorthodox fashion when they crossed your path."

Willis' gray eyes became bleak in anger at the lieutenant's words.

"Never mind that con," he said through set lips. "Get on with the business at hand."

He could have kicked himself for not retrieving the card. His prints were all over it. And the police had found it on file. Every private dick had to have his prints registered.

"Okay," Barnes said, grinning slightly. He had scored with his indirect reference to Willis' past. Now he was prepared to get down to cases.

"What were you there for, tonight?" he asked, seating himself on the edge of the desk, facing Willis.

Willis realized he was more or less in a spot. It was his policy that his clients' affairs were strictly confidential. He observed that rule, no matter what the pressure against him.

"Listen, Barnes," he began in an earnest voice, "you're right on that. I was there. But I had nothing to do with any killing."

"I know that," Barnes assured him, surprisingly. "Here, look at this."

He handed Willis a piece of rope that one of the detectives had brought in.

It looked to be an ordinary section of common clothesline.

"Uh uh." Barnes shook his head to Willis' question. "That's not an ordinary piece of rope. That wasn't woven by any machine. That's a hand-made job. And it was found around the scrawny neck of the Crombe woman."

WILLIS barely smothered the gasp that had risen to his lips. He knew where he had seen such a piece of rope. At the Kincaid Museum, in the Aztec exhibit.

For woven into the rope was a strange pattern—a feathered serpent.

"Now suppose you give out with a little information, Willis. What were you doing there?"

Willis' lips were a straight line.

"I was there on business," he said shortly.

Barnes studied the card.

"I see you were," he said. "What kind of business?"

"Sorry, Barnes," Willis said regretfully. "But that's strictly confidential."

"Y' know," Barnes said softly, "I could throw you in jail as a material witness."

Willis shrugged his shoulders.

Barnes' voice showed an edge of steel:

"Look, wise guy! This is murder! What did you and she have to talk about?"

"Say," Willis asked suddenly, "what time did all this take place?"

Barnes' eyes clouded with suspicion.

"Around nine, as close as we can make out. Why?"

Willis told of the doorbell that had rung. And remembered that it was about nine when that had happened.

Barnes gave an order to the detective who had remained in the room after he brought in the rope:

"Check that doorbell for prints."

"Look," Willis said. "You know me, Barnes. Maybe I've worked things in my own way. But when it comes down to cases, I've never pulled anything like this on the Department. My word on it! I don't know anything about the old lady's murder."

Barnes mulled over what Willis had said and came to a quick decision.

"All right, Willis. I'll play ball. But God help you, if ever I find out that you put me in the middle."

THE girl at the switchboard eyed the tall stranger with appreciation. He

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was impeccably dressed in a dark suit of excellent cut. He had dark wavy hair, with just the touch of gray at the temple which made women's hands fairly itch to smooth. Gray eyes, long straight nose, stubborn outthrust chin . . . all in all the sort of dream man she had wanted all her life. The gum she was chewing was neatly tucked away in the corner of her jaw as she asked:

"Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes." He smiled and her heart turned over. She just knew his eyes were going to crinkle at the corners.

"Yes," he said again. "I would like to see whoever is in charge of . . . that is, a shipment has gone astray. And I want to see someone about tracing it."

"Miss Woodruff, third desk down, sir."

Cary Willis sat down in the chair indicated by Miss Woodruff, a stocky woman in her early thirties.

"How may I help you, Mister . . . ?"

"Hugh Temple," Willis said easily. "It's this way, Miss Woodruff. I'm a private detective. I have reason to believe that a certain person has sent a trunk by means of the Express Limited Co." He held up his hand, as she started to speak. "I have no interest in the trunk, other than a desire to know if it has been sent through your company."

She regarded him gravely, for a second, then asked:

"Do you know its destination?"

"Yes. The Coastwise Steamship Company of Galveston, Texas. The shipper was Jane Smith of 1254 Rush Street. It was shipped between the twelfth and twentieth of this month."

The woman excused herself and walked away.

Willis chewed his lips nervously. He had found the Coastwise Shipping Company listed in one of the business directories at the Public Library. This was just guesswork, that she had shipped the trunk. And if she had, when.

Miss Woodruff returned, a smile large on her face.

"Yes. The trunk was shipped on the sixteenth. And to the Coastwise Steamship Company. There was also a hold order on it, which means it will not be called for immediately."

He could have kissed her plain countenance in gratitude.

His next stop was at the offices of one of the air lines. There he purchased a ticket to Galveston. On discovering that a plane was to leave within the next hour and that he could get a seat on it, he decided against returning to his hotel for the articles necessary for his trip. He was carrying plenty of money, so he reasoned that whatever change of clothing might be required could be purchased in Galveston.

The trip was without incident. He slept through most of it, being the sort of man whose cares are laid aside at the urging of nature.

THE plane was already dipping its nose into the wind, preparatory to coming in on the concrete of the landing apron at the Galveston airport, when he opened his eyes. A smiling stewardess helped unfasten his safety belt.

"Sleep well, sir?"

"As the innocent," he replied.

Dusk was gathering on the field. Too late to get to the Coastwise, he mused. Might as well hop a cab and check into some hotel.

. . . He saw the cab driver was watching him, and grinning, from the rear-view mirror.

"Stranger in town, eh?" said the driver without turning his head.

Willis wiped his heavily perspiring face and said he was.

"Always tell a stranger," the cabbie

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said, the grin still on his face. "Break out in a big sweat the minute they get in town. You'll get used to it pretty soon."

"I hope I don't have to," Willis said in rejoinder. Then, realising that he had not told the driver where to go, he asked:

"By the way, where's there a good hotel in town?"

"The Austin. That's where I'm taking you, sir."

They were crossing an immense bridge.

"The Causeway, sir. Be in the city in a minute."

"By the way, driver, where are the docks?"

"Along the bay. At the east end, just past the Mexican section."

"Mexican section?"

"Yeah. Most of them work on the dockside. Stevedores. Lots of the boats that come in are from Mexico."

Willis digested the information in silence.

"Here we are, sir," said the driver, pulling up before the Austin.

Willis paid him off and went in. A neon sign in the corner of the lobby attracted his attention. It advertised the presence of a cocktail lounge. It proved to be air-conditioned and quite crowded.

Willis ordered an old-fashioned at the bar and sipped at the drink. Most of the customers were big men, all wearing the sand-colored, wide-brimmed hats Texans like. Most of the talk was about boats rather than cattle. Willis shoved his empty glass back at the bartender and ordered another.

"Well, Jed," said a broad-beamed man at Willis' right, "what're you and the missus gonna do tonight?"

The man called Jed said:

"Goin' down on the levee. The Mex's got a *fiesta* on tonight. The old lady likes 'em."

The other guffawed.

"*Fiesta!* Frijoles and tortillas. *Mariachi* serenadin' the senoritas. And tourists drinkin' Carta Blanca. Man, every time there's a reason for a drunk, they call it a *fiesta!* That's what it 'mounts to."

Willis finished his drink, threw a dollar on the bar and walked out through the street entrance of the lounge. There was a cab pulled up at the curb. Willis recognized it as the same one that had brought him to the hotel.

"Yes sir?" said the driver brightly, recognizing Willis and remembering the tip he'd received.

"The *fiesta*," Willis directed.

NARROW dimly lighted streets. A street lined with cantinas and restaurants. Mexicans—the men in the gaudy capes they wore on these occasions; the women in rebozos and shapeless dresses. Here and there, as they passed street intersections, Willis saw the dim shapes of ships at their berths. And above all, the rank smell of the gulf, commingled with that of refuse thrown haphazardly on curbs.

The driver pulled up before a large cafe. A gilt-lettered sign across the window, proclaimed it to be the "Pan-American Cafe."

Willis walked in, took one look at the bar packed three deep, heard the drunken roar of the patrons and walked right out again. He stood at the curb, debating with himself as to whether he should return to the hotel or seek amusement elsewhere. It looked like Jed's friend had been right.

"Like to see *fiesta*, sair?" a voice came up from under his elbow.

Willis looked down at the urchin who had asked the question and grinned at the sight of him. He wasn't more than ten. He was dressed in imitation of

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his elders, with cape, narrow-fitting trousers, the seams of which were embroidered in silver. On his head was the largest sombrero Williss had ever seen. But like all the others, he was barefoot.

"Sure," Willis said amiably.

"*Un peso,* sair," the urchin said, his hand upthrust.

Willis put a dollar bill into the dirty palm. A barely smothered gasp of joy escaped the boy's lips and the shoe-button eyes looked almost worshipfully at Willis.

"You come, sair. I eshow you everythin'," his guide said, starting into the Pan-American Cafe.

Willis pulled him back.

"Not there son. I just come out. Aren't there other places besides this?"

The shoe-button eyes narrowed in thought. Then a white-toothed smile lighted the face.

"I know," he announced joyously. "You want see *fiesta!* Come."

Willis shook his head in wonderment. That had been the arrangement from the beginning, he thought. Shrugging his shoulders in amusement he followed after the little figure of his self-appointed guide.

The way led down side streets dreary and dark. Willis began to wonder, after a few minutes of this, whether the boy knew where he was going. Suddenly they were there.

Shuttered windows made mysterious the basement flat of their goal. The boy trotted down the stairs as though he was quite at home there. Willis hesitated on the top step.

"Come, sair, in here."

The boy opened the door and Willis followed him into a strange scene.

It was a sort of cafe into which they'd stepped. To one side was a small bar. Tables were scattered about the room. Willis sniffed the air. His nose told him something was cooking. Then he saw at the far end of the room two small kilns at which several fat and perspiring women presided. He felt someone tug at his arm.

"I eshow you real fiesta," the boy said. Then with a courtesy that an older person would have envied "you esit,' sair, please."

WILLIS "esat." The youngster took a seat also, as though it was in their bargain that he was to share in the entertainment. A small dark man, distinguishable for a huge and unkempt mustache, made his appearance.

The boy rattled off a string of words at him. And in a few moments the waiter returned, bearing several dishes, the odors of which made Willis' mouth water and made him realize that he had not eaten for a number of hours. Willis recognized frijoles and tortillas among the foods. But the rest was a mystery to him. Whatever it was, it was delicious.

The boy waded through his, as though he had not eaten for weeks, then called the waiter again and ordered something else. This time only a few seconds elapsed before the man returned. Before the boy, he placed a bottle of pop. And before Willis a small glass of milky liquid.

"Pulque," the boy said. "Drink."

Willis did as he was bid. In a single gulp, as he saw the others do. His throat worked convulsively, his eyes popped and his mouth opened and closed, as though seeking a breath that had suddenly been denied him.

The boy regarded him owlishly.

"Estrong, sair?"

"Whoo!" Willis gasped at last. "What is it—distilled dynamite?"

The boy grinned.

"You like, sair? Me order 'nother."

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"Never mind, Junior. Say, what *is* your name?"

"Fernando, sair."

"Well, Fernando, what kind of place is this?"

"This *real* Mexican cafe. Not for *tourista*. But me like you. Ah!" An exclamation was suddenly wrung from him. Willis followed the direction of the boy's glance and saw three Mexicans appear on the platform at the end of the bar.

One carried a bull-fiddle, another a guitar and the third a fiddle. They were resplendent in gaudy jackets, embroidered trousers, shining boots, silver-spurred, and on each shoulder a vari-colored serape was draped.

"The *Mariachi,*" the boy breathed ecstatically.

Willis gathered, from Fernando's expression, that this was a special occasion indeed. He noticed the air of hushed expectancy which greeted the arrival of the musicians.

There were no announcements of what songs they intended doing. They simply broke into a song, without preamble, at a gesture from the fiddle player. Willis found it enjoyable and relaxing. He felt grateful to Fernando for bringing him to this place. At his elbow another of the dynamite drinks, called pulque, had been placed. Willis had become so engrossed in the music, he didn't remember ordering it.

The first few songs were not particularly unusual. Then Willis noticed something odd. It had to do with the serapes on the singers' shoulders. A design already familiar to Willis was woven into the texture of the cloth.

It was the mystifying pattern of the feathered serpent.

THE music, at first in the familiar pattern of the La Paloma Hat Dance, now took on a more subtle, more stirring beat. To Willis, the bull-fiddle was a drum, beating time to a wild and sensuous rhythm played by the fiddle and guitar. It stirred the senses strangely. His eyes took in the audience and noticed they too were not immune to the music. An electric excitement seemed to fill the air.

These Mexicans—they were like the Navajos of Arizona, Willis thought. There was so much of the Indian in them. In their lethargic manner that, at a second's notice, could be stirred to a wild fury. He noticed how the music was affecting them. The nostrils of the men were dilating as if they were not breathing the air of this damp basement, but were on some mountain top of their mysterious homeland, going through the strange mysteries of one of their wild ceremonies. The women, too, were not immune to the music. They swayed back and forth in time to the rhythm.

Now the music took on a deeper note, a more compelling sound. And from behind a curtained doorway, which Willis noticed for the first time, came four girls.

They were dressed in simple costumes, devoid of frills. And once again Willis thought there was something familiar about this. Those dresses! He had seen them some place before. And the thought also came to him: "ceremonies—mountain top." Why had those words come to mind? Then the girls began to dance and all thoughts were driven from Willis' mind.

It was a queer sort of dance. Willis had never seen anything like it before. At first they moved slowly, in a cumbrous movement, as if the effort to move was too great. Then they began to swing their arms about in slow flapping gestures. Willis was reminded of small birds in their first flight. The arms moved in swifter, more graceful rhythm,

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and they wove a serpentine design about the musicians as they danced.

Fernando mumbled something, and Willis' attention was momentarily taken from the dancers. When he looked again, the dancers were still. But now there was a fifth girl.

It was Jane Smith.

HOW had she gotten there? Where had she come from? *Why* was she there? Those were the questions which ran through Willis' mind. He watched her with an intentness that gave to his face a carved look.

She stood motionless on the center of the small platform. Then she raised her arms to the level of her shoulders. And Willis gasped. The electric light threw back a thousand reflections from the gleaming stones of her dress—a dress that Willis recognized immediately. The robe of Ixanthlu!

Attached to the under-part of the robe was a row of feather streamers. And when she raised her arms in that slow gesture, he saw that there were also feathers extending the length of her arms. She looked like a great bird as she stood there, a bird ready to take flight.

An involuntary exclamation burst from his lips:

"Jane Smith—and the Robe!"

"'Scusa, pliss," a voice said at his elbow.

He turned and saw the waiter, towel in hand, about to wipe away the drink it was evident he had spilled. Willis gave him a look of annoyance and once more turned his attention to the girl on the platform.

If he expected her to dance, he was doomed to disappointment. Hers was only a passive role. It wasn't till later that he realized that she was a symbol to the dancers. Although the meaning of the symbolism escaped him.

Now the dancers began a wild series of leaps around the center figure of Jane Smith. Her arms rose and fell, rose and fell to the music.

"Your drink, sair," the waiter said. Another glass of pulque stood at Willis' elbow.

He drained the contents at a single gulp. It seemed to be even more bitter than usual. He caught a glimpse of Fernando from the corners of his eyes. The boy's entire attention was on the scene before him. Willis looked again toward the dancers and felt a wave of dizziness attack him. He shook his head, trying to clear it. Instead, it made him even more dizzy. His lids felt leaden, the eyes themselves seemed to be on fire, and his head was a weighted ball, dangling from his neck.

His head fell forward, chin against the table-top. For a moment he regarded Fernando with an owlish glance. Then the lids closed over his lacklustre eyes.

CHAPTER IV

"BETTER hit the deck, chum."

Willis' eyes opened at the foreign sound. He closed them, as an attack of vertigo made his head swim. Then he felt nausea grip him and he leaned over the side of the berth and vomited into a bucket that was waiting for just such an emergency.

"Thanks, pal," he said after the attack passed and his throat felt clear.

"'S okay, bud," said the stranger. "I know just how you feel. That Tequilla hits like the kick of a mule."

Willis sat up, bumped his head on the frame of the bunk above him, said, "Ouch," and looked wonderingly about him. He was in a ship's quarters. The row of bunks across from where he was sitting was proof of that. And if that wasn't enough, there was the unmis-

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takable motion of a ship's movement. That cradle-like rocking, which is peculiar to all ships at sea.

He turned his attention to the individual who had awakened him. The man stood, swaying easily to the ship's motion, and regarded him with laughing eyes. A mop of unkempt hair crowned a broad and unmistakably Irish face. Naked to the waist, his broad, hairy chest streamed sweat.

"Better turn out, fella. The chief is a little on the hot side this morning. Too much *fiesta*, yesterday."

Willis' faculties had started to function again. That is, up to a certain point. Then there was a blank space that was climaxed by his awakening here. Questions as to what had happened at the cafe and how it was that he was on this ship, were what he wanted an immediate answer to.

He swung dungaree-covered legs over the bunk and said:

"Yeah. And I want to see the chief. I want to ask him how I got on board?"

There was the sound of a door opening.

"Hist!" the red-headed man whispered "Act drunk."

Then a shadow was cast between them and a thick voice said:

"Git below, ye dock rats!"

"Aye, Blackie," the red-head said, whirling and making for the companionway. Then, over his shoulder at Willis, "C'mon, you. Them engines need wiping."

"Never mind him," Blackie growled.

Blackie waited until the other's footsteps died, then said:

"Now get this, mister. We don't want any trouble outa you. So do your work and keep your nose clean. Okay? . . . Now beat it!"

A hot reply rose to Willis' lips. Then he realized that he was on board ship and at the mercy of Blackie and whoever else was in charge. Too, why had the red-head cautioned him to pretend drunkeness? Mumbling something, Willis made his way after the red-head.

ON DECK, Willis had his first view of the ship. It was a tanker of not too recent construction. The rolling motion of the ship sent him skidding into the scuppers. He steadied himself against a stanchion, then made his way forward.

"Hey," a voice called from the shadows of a companionway. "Over here."

It was the red-head.

He waited till Willis was alongside, then said, "Follow me."

Willis went down four steps behind the other. The red-head made a turn and went down another companionway which ended on a metal cat-walk. Another companionway at the end of that . . . and down that one to a doorway. The doorway was their goal.

A cacophonous clang of metal striking metal smote Willis' ear. There was the rancid odor of hot engine oil. And heat rolled in waves to meet them.

The red-head walked to a box set along the wall and took a number of waste rags from it. Motioning with his head for Willis to follow, he continued along the cat-walk. It ended in a steel ladder that extended downward for twenty feet until it ended on the floor of the engine room.

"Anybody asks you what you're doing, tell 'em you're Mike's helper. And just do what I'm doing," the red-head said. Then he went down the stairs at a trot.

THEY found refuge behind the pumping arms of an engine. Mike began wiping excess oil from the machine, while Willis impatiently waited for the red-head to explain his actions. There was a broad smile on Mike's Irish

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face, when finally he turned to Willis and said:

"Don't look so worried, man. You're safe here."

"Safe, hell," Willis snarled, the pent-up anger in him breaking loose. "That guy Blackie is trouble. And what's all this about? How . . ."

"It's like this, my friend," Mike began. "I figured there was something screwy going on when I saw those two gorillas, Juan and Ed, lugging you between them down the gangplank. But, like Blackie says, 'Keep your nose clean and you won't get into trouble.' "

"So?" Willis asked. "What made you get your nose dirty?"

"Your hands," Mike answered.

Willis looked at them blankly.

"They're clean," Mike answered the unspoken question. "And that manicure is still fresh. So I asks myself, how come a guy like this, smelling like he'd hit every saloon in Galveston, is shanghied into an old scow like the *Tlaxco?*"

"And what answer did you get?" Willis asked.

"What answer have you got?"

Willis let it ride. "Something else," he said: "Why did you tell me to act drunk when this Blackie guy came down?"

"Because Blackie is a very hard guy to get along with. He likes to use his hands too much, if you know what I mean. And I figured I'd better warn you. We'll be in Vera Cruz by morning and then you can blow off. If you got complaints, you can see the American Consul there."

There was the sound of footsteps in their direction. Willis hastily grabbed one of the rags and imitated Mike's leisurely wiping of the piston arm. Nor did he look up to see who it was that had stopped there. Willis caught only the view of a pair of oil-stained heavy-toed boots. Then they passed from his range of vision.

"That part's all right," Willis said after whoever it was that had watched them had gone. "What I don't get is, *why* they shanghied me? I'm not even asking how I got these mechanic's clothes on. But I had seven thousand dollars with me. And somebody got that dough. Now if it was Blackie and his boys, what was the sense of bringing me aboard? They already got the dough. Let's carry it further. Suppose they were seen, do you think they'll give me a chance to get off the boat? Especially at a place where there's an American consul?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"I dunno," he said. "Blackie ain't got much sense. But he's just the muscle. Captain Torres is the brains. And, answering for him, I'd say no. So that brings us to the only other theory. That they were paid to get rid of you."

"That was my thought too," Willis said.

"Why," asked Mike," did they have to go through all that trouble? When all they had to do was tie a weight around your neck and throw you into the gulf."

IT WAS Willis' turn to shrug his shoulders. He couldn't answer Mike's question without involving himself.

"Maybe," Willis said, "they thought that there was a chance that someone would fish me out before I was dead."

Mike's grease-stained face showed the disgust he felt at Willis' inane remark.

"Mister," Mike said," I'm not too bright. But I don't get it. In . . ."

"Look, Mike," Willis interrupted. "I appreciate your interest—but I don't understand it. Why? What makes you so hot about all that's happening to me?"

Mike mumbled something under his

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breath. Willis' brow wrinkled as he strained to hear what the words were. Then a hand fell roughly on his shoulder.

"Hey, you!" a thick voice said, and pulled at Willis' shoulder in emphasis, "The Captain wants to see you."

Mike also arose at the words.

"Not you," the dark-skinned messenger said. "Just him."

. . . Willis regarded Captain Torres with quiet intent. He was reminded of some actor he had once seen. Then Torres spoke:

"I look like Leo Carillo, no?"

An involuntary, "That's it," escaped Willis' lips before he could stop the words.

Torres grinned. "Is good," he said. "I like make good impression. Now it makes for good talk, no?"

"Sure," Willis said. "And I'll make it easy on you. Where's the seven thousand dollars?"

"You know," Torres said easily. "I like you. So I gonna ask you be my guest for rest of voyage."

Willis started. Torres unexpected request was the last thing he had expected.

Willis' voice was plaintive as he said: "Now wait a minute, Captain! You're going a little too fast for a guy like me. Let's start from the beginning. How did I get on this boat? Where did I get these clothes? What . . ."

Torres blew smoke in Willis' direction. Then, with his slender fingers giving accent to his words, he said:

"What difference all this make? You are here now. You no have to worry. Everything be hokay. Tomorrow we be in Vera Cruz. You get off boat, see girls in cantinas. Come back, boat not there. Then what you do?"

The dim suspicion that this mystery was a part of an even greater mystery, took shape in Willis' mind.

"Why," he answered carefully, "I'd go to the American Consul's office and . . ."

"No." Torres smiled broadly, as if the whole thing was a marvelous joke. "You don't do that. You go to the Cantina Del Sol and ask for Pepe. Understan'? You ask for Pepe."

Willis nodded soberly.

"Hokay, my frien'," Torres said. "Now you can go back to that Mike, who has what Blackie call nose trouble, and tell him what I say. And tell him that I'm not Pan-Archista either."

That was the only thing that made sense. That Torres was not a Pan-Archista. But what had that to do with Mike?'

. . .

MIKE rocked back and forth on his heels, as Willis related what had happened to him. There was the usual grin on his lips as he listened. But Willis noticed that the grin did not extend to his eyes.

"All right, wise guy," Willis demanded. "You've been asking all the questions. Now suppose you give with some of the answers."

"So Torres was wise all the time," Mike said in a low voice. It was as though he were talking to himself. Then to Willis: "Sorry, friend. Can't oblige. Maybe if things change. And you're still around . . ."

Whatever it was, Willis knew it didn't concern him. And Mike was satisfied that Torres was a friend. Even though he couldn't figure out the angles.

Mike snapped fingers in irritation.

"Damn! Why did Torres tell you to go to Pepe? That Sol Cantina's a notorious hangout for Pan-Archistas."

"What's all this about Pan-Archistas?" Willis asked. "Oh I've read something about them in the papers. But I'm a little hazy . . ."

"Well," Mike began, "I won't go into

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a lengthy explanation. But after the war, there was a lot of internal strife in some countries. Even in ours. Mexico wasn't immune to it. For example, take this boat.

"It's a tanker plying the Gulf between Vera Cruz and Galveston. It carries oil to Galveston and oil in return. The natural question is, why? Mexico has oil. Then why all this business of transhipment? It's all a question of processing. We in the states have the facilities. They haven't. So . . . an outfit like the Pan-Archistas have a wedge to talk fascist doctrines."

"I get it," Willis cried. "You're a Fed. I knew I smelled a gumshoe at work when you started asking questions."

"And you?" Mike shot back. "What are you, that you associate with hot characters like Torres? Don't play the innocent," he continued when Willis began a protest. "I suppose you didn't know that the owner of this boat was Corta? Or that . . ."

"Who did you saw owned this boat?" Willis asked incredulously.

"Hernando Corta, top man in the Pan-Archista movement."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Willis said softly.

THE sign was as weatherbeaten as the shack it adorned. And the letters were so faded that Willis could barely decipher them. But that it was the Cantina Del Sol, there was no doubt.

Mike trotted up the rickety steps, Willis at his side, and into the dim, foul-smelling interior. It had one virtue for which they were thankful: it was blessedly cool inside.

They sat at one of the tables and, as though it was in the nature of things, two women joined them. The women sat silent, waiting their pleasure. Mike pulled a handful of coins from his pocket and, giving them all to one of the frowsy-looking women, jerked with his thumb in the direction of the juke box in a corner of the room.

In a moment the strains of *Cielito Lindo* filled the air.

"Carta Blanca," Mike said to the evil-looking waiter who came for their order.

"Pacifico," the waiter corrected him.

"Bueno," Mike said.

They drank their beer straight from the bottle. And the women accepted the beer as their just due.

Willis sat back and looked about him curiously. There were as many women as men. Most of the men were sailors, but here and there were others hard to define as to occupation. Willis' eyes went wide on seeing that all those who were not sailors wore guns swung low in holsters strapped to their thighs.

The waiter returned and gathered up the empty bottles.

Mike's hand made a gesture to bring another four bottles. Then as the waiter turned to leave, Mike took hold of his sleeve. The waiter looked down at the restraining hand.

"Pepe here?" Mike asked softly.

The waiter's eyes, shiny and dumb-looking, gave no hint of what he was thinking. Nor did he answer Mike. He merely shrugged off his hand and walked away. Mike leaned back in his chair and waited developments.

In a moment the waiter returned bearing four more bottles. And behind him, came the largest Mexican Willis had ever seen.

The big guy dragged a chair over and, straddling it, asked:

"Who wants to see Pepe?"

"I do," Willis said.

"So?"

"Captain Torres of the *Tlaxco* told me to see you."

"So! There was an evident interest

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in his voice. "Torres send, eh? Why?"

"I don't know," Willis answered. And grinned suddenly in realization that it was as he had said, he didn't know.

The Mexican thought it was funny, too, for he banged his fist on the table, sending the bottles dancing. Laughter rumbled deep in his throat and exploded into the air.

The women did not think it funny, though. At the sound of his Gargantuan laughter, they scrambled hastily from their seats and scurried away as if the devil were at their heels.

Whether by accident or on purpose, their table was in the darkest part of the cantina. When Pepe's sudden smashing blow sounded, three men at the bar turned and stared hard at Willis and his friends. Willis didn't have to take a second look to recognize one of them. It was his friend of the five thousand dollar retainer, Senor Corta.

FOR the barest second, Willis started to his feet, then when Corta gave him no sign of recognition, Willis kept his peace. But the Mexican, Pepe, had seen the movement.

"Well, amigo," he said, crooked yellow teeth showing below the bastion of his thick moustache, "you want me to show you somethin'?"

Willis grinned in reply and started to answer, when Mike whispered a warning, motioning with his head toward the door. Willis turned to see the reason for the warning, and saw Blackie and two others coming through the crowd near the door.

Through the corner of his eye, Willis saw Pepe, too, had become interested in Blackie. The mate, unconscious of the attention he was receiving, walked straight to Corta at the bar. They formed a close group at the bar for a moment, then, with Corta in the lead, they started for the door just as one of the women who had been at their table whispered something to the scar-faced bartender.

Hurriedly, he called to someone in Corta's group. One of them went over to talk to the barman. When he returned to his party, it was evident from his excited gestures that something was in the wind. Nor did it take long for Willis and his friends to see that they were the cause of the excitement.

As one, the six turned and looked toward the three sitting at the table in the corner. Then, with Blackie in the lead, they started in that direction. And there was that in their attitude which spelled trouble.

Pepe had swiveled his chair around slightly, so that he was facing the oncoming men. Then, although he did not turn is head to them, he said to Willis and Mike:

"Is troble, amigos. When I start, follow me. And go like hell!"

They weren't more than ten feet away when Pepe leisurely arose, one hand holding to the back of his chair. Then, as if the chair were matchwood, he sent it skidding into the path of Blackie and the rest.

Blackie went down, howling in pain and carrying three of the others with him. By the time they had untangled themselves, Pepe and the two Americans were almost at the door at the rear of the cantina.

Behind him, Willis heard the deep voice of someone shouting commands. But he was too busy following Pepe to pay much heed to the excitement they had caused. Pepe, making astonishing speed in his high-heeled Mexican boots, was running full tilt for the rear of the cantina.

A shot rang out and yelping women and excited men fled from their path. Now they were in a narrow corridor.

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At the end of it, a door barred their path. Pepe lowered his head and, without pausing in his pace, ran full at it. And right through! Despite their peril, Willis found time to admire the bull-like strength of Pepe.

IT WAS a narrow, low-ceilinged room into which they'd come. Tobacco made a gray haze along the dark ceiling. In the center of the room was a table about which six men were gathered. Pepe's dramatic entrance had frozen them in attitudes of stone. Then, as the shouting voices from beyond the room came to them and they understood what had happened, they moved into action.

But not as quickly as Pepe! Willis hadn't known that Pepe carried a gun. All he saw was a lightning-like move of the hand and a pistol appeared in it. Then the gun was belching flame and smoke. And then he was too busy himself to pay attention to what his friends were doing.

Pepe had fired twice, each shot knocking off a man. One of the men he shot put his hands to his belly, coughed softly once and sank to his knees. The other was knocked backward by the force of the bullet. Then the four who remained made a break for the open.

Willis, in trying to sidestep one, only moved directly into his path. He was a short, thick-shouldered man, and the panic he was in made him throw discretion to the winds. Willis chopped down at his head and the other ducked the swing, bringing up his own hand in a blow at Willis' middle. There was a difference, though; for in the other's hand was a slender-bladed knife.

Willis pivoted like an adagio dancer, chopping down with the side of his palm at the other's wrist. The knife went flying and, at the same time, Willis brought up his right hand in a slashing uppercut at the small man's chin. The blow connected, spinning him to one side. Something hit Willis a blow at the side of the neck, knocking him to his knees.

The room was filled with furious sound. Shots exploded violently, men screamed in pain or shouted in anger. A hand reached down and pulled Willis erect. Shaking his head free of the cobwebs from the blow, Willis looked quickly about him. He had time only for a quick glance, then he was in action again.

Mike had Blackie in a headlock and seemed to be doing his best to strangle him. In a corner, Pepe was engaged with three men. While through the open door a stream of reinforcements was coming to help.

A sudden violent anger possessed Willis. Bellowing his defiance, he plunged in to the defense of his friends. His fists flailed about, scattering men like ten pins. But the odds were too great. Already Mike was down, with three men hanging to his arms and another two holding to his legs.

A face in front of Willis suddenly spewed blood in a crimson stream over him. He didn't know that it was his fist that had caused it. He had only one thought in mind: to kill as many of these men as he could. Another staggered from his path as his fist, in a piston-like blow, caught the man on his chin. Then Pepe was free and the gun in his hand spoke once more and the single gas light that furnished the room with illumination, went out.

"Amigos," Pepe's voice was a hoarse bellow. "Thees way!"

Willis ran to where he had last seen Mike. In the darkness he bumped into someone. His aching fists struck once more and then Mike was at his side shouting:

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"C'mon, pal, this way."

SOMEONE groaned in front of them and fell heavily to the floor. Then a door opened and they saw Pepe, his huge figure outlined in the bright sunlight, blocking the doorway. Then they were through . . . and Pepe had slammed the door closed.

He leaned his broad shoulders against the door and commanded they bring a timber laying on the ground, to him. Bracing one end against the earth, he thrust the other end against the door, barring it effectively.

"Horses," he gasped. "In the arroyo."

Willis looked dazedly about him. He saw now that the cantina had been built against the side of a hill. Pepe was already clambering up the steep slope. They followed him quickly. They reached the top and Mike wiped sweat and blood from his chin. It was then that Willis first realized that he had been wounded. He put his hand to his side and drew it away. The palm was wet with blood. And when he looked down, he saw that in the mellee he had suffered a knife wound.

But there was no time for a complete examination. Pepe was already sliding down the slope of the hill. The arroyo had a cactus-filled, uneven, rock-strewn floor. And at the far end four horses were tethered. In a moment they were mounted and riding like fury up the dry arroyo bed.

Then they were in rolling country. At the top of a small rise, Willis looked back and saw the whole of Vera Cruz spread out before him in the marshy flatland. Ahead, he saw that they were entering a region of shallow hills, through which ran the double tracks of a railroad. As they rode along, they caught a glimpse, now and then, of a macadam-paved highway. Pepe made it a point to avoid the highway as much as possible, yet stay parallel to it.

Pepe rode as if his destination was very far off. For he neither looked back nor to the side, but set his horse's head straight to the front. The bouncing of his horse's gait sent pain rolling in waves through Willis. It got so bad he could no longer contain the groan that was forced from him.

Mike, only a few feet ahead of Willis, heard the groan and, turning, noticed the stain on the denim shirt-front. Reining his horse in beside Willis, he asked:

"When did that happen?"

"Back—there—at the joint," Willis gasped with an effort.

Pepe turned his head at that moment and, seeing the two no longer riding, came over at a gallop. One look and he knew the reason.

"Is not far," he said, his eyes narrowed in speculation. "No can stop now."

"Go ahead," Willis gritted between set teeth. "I can hold out."

THEY had been riding parallel to the road for a little while. Now Pepe turned at right angles to it. Their new path sent them directly into the hills. How Pepe managed to know where he was going was a mystery to the other two; for there was no trail, as far as they could see. Yet, that he knew where he was going was obvious to them, for there was no hesitation in his headlong gallop.

They arrived at their destination with an abruptness that was startling. In one moment there was nothing but the brown dusty hills; then they had ridden around a bend in the slope and came to a half dozen adobe huts.

Still at a gallop, Pepe rode between the walls of two of the huts and brought his horse to a rearing halt before a

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structure that was more pretentious than the others. Where the others were single-storied affairs, this one was of two stories. And where the rest had a half dozen natives squatting in the dirt before the entrance, this was barren of them.

Mike, on seeing Pepe dismount, also dismounted; and between the two they managed to take Willis from his horse without too much pain for the wounded man. Then, supporting him on either side, they walked into the dim, cool interior.

It took a few seconds to accustom their eyes to the soft light of the inside. When they did, they saw that there were several people in the room. But Willis had eyes for only one: the small slender figure of Jane Smith.

This time she was dressed in a gayly colored blouse and skirt. Her raven hair was brushed straight back and rolled into braids at the back.

A fatuous grin parted Willis' lips as he murmured in a barely audible tone:

"Imagine seeing you—here—Miss Smi——"

Then he slipped to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING cool and soft caressed Willis' cheek. He turned his head and looked into the dark, beautiful eyes of Jane Smith. It had been her fingers that he had felt. His head was held prisoner in her lap. On seeing that he was conscious again she colored and let his head down gently on the blanket that had been placed beneath him.

The color fled her cheeks, leaving them pale. But her eyes were still soft. Willis grinned up at her and said:

"All I can say is, it was worth it."

Her cheeks dimpled in a smile at his words. But when he started to get to his feet, she pushed him back with fingers that were gentle but firm.

"Not yet," she said in warning. "Toclezuma told me the poultice had to remain on until it dried."

It was then, for the first time, Willis noticed that his shirt had been removed and a concoction of leaves had been pressed against his wound. The bleeding had already stopped and there was little pain. He smiled up at the lovely face above him and looked about.

They had taken him upstairs. Through the open window he could see the roof of an adobe hut. The walls of his room were plastered white. It made the room seem cool. He turned his gaze away from the view of the window and his eyes caught sight of something on the far wall.

It was roughly done and showed signs of having been executed by native hands. But there was no mistaking it. It was an immense plaque, carved in bas-relief: an immense reproduction of the flying serpent!

When he brought his eyes back to the girl's, he was startled by the change in them. They were as hard and shiny as those of the natives.

"'S matter?" he asked, concern in his voice.

Her voice was as hard as her eyes:

"And now, Mr. Willis, why have you followed me? First to Galveston and then to Vera Cruz?"

It wasn't what he had expected her to ask. Yet he could understand why she had asked the question. But first he wanted some questions answered himself.

"You're right," he said flippantly, "I did follow you. But tell me, how did you know my name was Willis? There aren't any labels on me. And I didn't follow you here; I was brought here, or rather chased here. So I'll make a bargain . . ."

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"I'm afraid you're not in any position to make bargains," she said in reminder. "As for knowing your name, it was in the wallet of your jacket."

"So it was your gang that shanghied me," he burst out in sudden anger. "Well, all I can say is that it was a lousy trick. After all, all I wanted to do was talk to you."

"Very well—" she began, and then stopped at the sound of footsteps.

Willis turned his head at the sound and saw, coming into the room, the strangest looking figure he had ever seen.

IT WAS a man, dressed in the oddest costume. For the most part the costume consisted of feathers. There were a jacket and a short skirt. Intricately embossed leather sandals reached to his knees. The Indian—for this was evident by the dark skin, thick lips and immobile features—strode into the room and came to a pause beside the girl.

But what held Willis' eyes was a sort of mace the Indian carried cradled in his arms. Again, the feathered serpent!

The Indian looked silently down at the white man and after a moment said:

"It is well. The herbs have done their work. Tlixo can make the journey to Chihuatlan. Our people grow impatient. The centuries have marched by too slowly for them."

Then, as if in that statement was the only reason for his visit, he turned and went out.

Willis shook his head in bewilderment.

"What goes here?" he asked. "What is this, a fancy dress ball? Who's old Sitting Bull? And who was he talking about?"

There was a strange gleam in Jane's eyes as she turned and called to someone in the room below, then her gaze came back to Willis.

"Old Sitting Bull, as you call him, is Toclezuma, high priest to the Aztec people. And he was talking to you, Tlixo."

"Holy cats," Willis whispered. "The girl's out of her head."

Her smile was enigmatic as she answered:

"Perhaps it is you who are that way. You see, Toclezuma was speaking in Aztec!"

Her words didn't make sense for a second. Then he became conscious of their meaning. In Aztec? But he didn't understand—— He gulped. There was no doubt in his mind. *He had understood every word the Indian had spoken!*

There was something of a plea in his eyes as he stared at the girl. She turned from him at the sound of sandal-shod feet on the stairs. An Indian, his arms holding articles of dress, came into the room. Silently, he handed the garments to Jane, turned and went back again.

"Here," the girl directed him, "better put these on. We had to get rid of your blood-stained shirt."

Willis saw that there was a complete change of clothing here. Silently he accepted them. Nor did he break his silence when she followed the Indian.

He was surprised to find that his wound was healed. At least it did not bother him when he donned the buttonless jacket. He had to grin at the reflection the mirror sent back to him. Of a naturally dark complexion, he looked as much of an Indian as any of them. The only difference was in his beard; the Indians he had seen were beardless.

THE room below was empty of life when he came down. But the sound of voices from outdoors told him that

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Jane and the rest were still there. He walked out and into a strange scene. Mike, hands bound, had been tied to a horse. Of Pepe, there was no sign.

Without a word, he walked up to the bound Mike and began to untie the knots in the rope. Two of the Indians leaped forward to prevent him from doing so, but were stopped at a word from Toclezuma. When the ropes fell away from Mike, Willis turned to the others and said:

"This man is my friend."

Toclezuma nodded as if satisfied with what Willis had done.

The sun was an orange ball resting on the crest of the hills to the west, as the entire party mounted and started off. Willis rode close to Mike. Although there was no evidence that any of the men was armed, Willis had the feeling that they were. Still, he and Mike were not prevented from carrying on a conversation while they rode.

Mike's unhandsome Irish pug face was drawn and tired-looking. But his eyes were as bright and undismayed as ever.

"Well," he asked Willis, "what do you think?"

Willis' lips pursed in a knowing grimace as he answered:

"I think they're nuts."

Mike's chin dropped.

"Nuts?"

"Sure," Willis elaborated. "That old guy—the one they call Toclezuma—claims I'm an Aztec chief. And the girl thinks the same thing. At least they're trying to convince me."

A couple of Indian braves spurred their horses close to them, cutting off conversation for the time. But they soon rode ahead and Willis continued:

"Personally I think Miss Smith knows what I'm after. She knows who I am. So she's got this old guy hepped up on this Indian chief business. Wait," he begged as Mike started to interrupt. "Now look, Mike, I've looked into her history. It was the first thing I did when I took the case.

"She's not the real daughter of this guy Smith. He found her in Mexico and adopted her. Somewhere down the line she got herself hipped on this business. Don't ask me how or where, because I don't know that either. But I'm as sure of that as I am my name is Cary Willis."

Willis paused to draw breath and Mike had his say:

"Who told you that you were an Aztec chief?"

"I told you. Toclezuma."

"That's funny," Mike said. "I've never heard him say anything—that I could understand anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, just before you came out, he and the girl were talking. But they were talking in a language that was over my head."

"Holy cats!" Willis exclaimed in disgust. "Now don't tell me you're getting that way too."

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "They say anything about where we're going?" he asked.

"Nope! But wherever it is, I'm gonna try to blow them off, if I can."

"The frying pan's hot," Mike said. "But I think you'll find the fire is hotter. And that's where you'll be if you try to get away, in these hills."

WILLIS digested the disquieting information in silence. He saw Mike was right. Even if he managed to escape from these mad people, where would he be? At least, while there was Mike to be had as an active ally, there was a chance for them if things turned up to change the picture.

Now the sun was below the hill crests. Twilight was a soft haze cover-

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ing the earth. Then it was night. But the Indian in the lead never stopped in the mile-devouring trot. They rode with monotonous regularity into and out of the dips of the low-lying hills. Willis became saddle sore as the miles sped by and there seemed no sign that they were anywhere near their destination.

The moon came up, gigantic and strangely illuminating. Its light made the landscape as clear as if it were daylight. Willis could even make out the configuration of the land for miles ahead. The hills, he noticed, were becoming higher, steeper. Hours went by. The moon rose higher in the sky. It was overhead; then in the descendency. Still they rode on.

Willis found himself nodding in the saddle. The motion of the horse was torture to him. Then, when he thought that if they went on for another ten feet he would curse aloud, there was a soft-voiced command and the cavalcade came to a halt.

Fires were lighted: in a moment the air became redolent with the fragrance of cooking food. Soft Indian voices made musical sounds in the night. But to all this Willis was unconscious.

Willis was asleep.

"G' WAY," Willis mumbled shrugging off the hand that shook at his shoulder.

"All right," a voice said. "Better get up, before we leave you here."

Willis sat erect at the words. Every bone, muscle and joint in his body ached. Above him, Mike stood, a bowl of steaming liquid in his hand.

"Here," he said, handing Willis the cup. "Your breakfast."

"Thanks," Willis said contritely. "Guess I can't take it. How the hell do you do it?"

"Setting-up exercises," Mike explained with a grin. "Plenty of fresh air, regular hours, and a cold bath . . ."

"Okay, okay," Willis said, laughing in spite of himself. "I get it." He looked about him. The Indians were preparing for another day's journey. Blankets were being rolled into tight sausage-like bundles and strapped to the horses' backs. Several of the men came from the edge of a nearby wooded section leading a number of horses. In a few minutes all was in readiness.

Willis walked as though he was on stilts. Somehow his feet felt as if they weren't mates. Mike gave him a hand up on his horse. Then they were off once more.

It was Willis who noticed the absence of Toclezuma.

"Say," Mike said when Willis pointed out the fact, "you're right. And I don't remember him leaving this morning. Must have sneaked out during the night. I don't get it, though. What was his idea?"

"And another thing," Willis said, eyes narrowed in speculation. "Notice how those bucks are in a close group around Miss Smith. Wonder what's cooking?"

"Whatever it is," Mike replied, "if it gets hot enough it'll boil over."

"Well I don't like it." Willis was firm on that point.

Again the passing of time in the monotonous way of the day before. But now the hills were small mountains. And with every mile they were becoming more steep, more tortuous and wild. Progress was no longer at a trot. The lead Indians were picking their way carefully over the rock-strewn trail.

Then it happened! One moment they were alone in the hills. The next, they were surrounded by wildly shouting, armed men who came riding down the steep sides of the wall-like escarp-

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ments. Willis saw that whatever the purpose of these strangers, it wasn't peaceful; for now some of them were using the guns they carried.

But he also saw that they were using the guns with the deliberate intent to kill off the girl's guard. One by one, the Indians about her fell.

Then he had no time to observe more, for the attackers were upon them. Mike, his face blazing in anger at the wanton killing, held his hands up over his head in token of surrender. Willis was forced to follow the other's example. In a matter of seconds the girl was alone, surrounded now by these strange men.

Willis' eyes went wide as he saw at last who the newcomers were. Cantering forward toward them came Corta and Blackie. There was a smile of cruel pleasure on the handsome features of the man who only a few days before had given Willis five thousand dollars to locate the very girl now in Corta's power.

CORTA and Blackie dismounted. Several of their followers dragged Willis and Mike from their horses.

"So," said Corta, "you thought to make a fool of me?"

Willis looked at him in amazement.

"Say," he said through tight lips," what're you talking about? And what's the idea of this? I thought you wanted me to find this girl and bring her to Mexico City?"

Corta's eyebrows shot skyward.

"I . . . told you to bring her to Mexico City?"

"Sure," Willis said heatedly. "When you were in my office a few days ago, back in Chicago. You even gave me five thousand dollars as a retainer."

Corta suddenly burst into shrill laughter.

"So my brother thinks the girl has a value of five thousand dollars! The fool! Well, to me she is priceless, eh, my dear?" He had turned and shot the question at the girl standing beside him.

An odd thrill surged through Cary Willis at the sight of the girl standing straight and proud next to Corta. She remained silent at his question. But on her face, in the tilt of her chin, in the impassively cold light of her eyes, was unspoken disgust for the man and what he had done.

Corta's broad grin faded at the sight of her face. It was replaced by a snarl as he came close to her.

"You are not in Chihuatlan," he gritted. "Perhaps it would be better for you if you treated me with less scorn."

She looked at him with open contempt. Then she spat full in his face.

Corta stepped forward and slapped her full across the mouth. An animal sound of fury broke in Willis' throat. Kicking backward as hard as he could, his heel caught the guard holding his arms squarely on the shin. Howling in pain, the guard released Willis, who, with a scream of rage, leaped at Corta.

THERE was but a single thought in Willis' mind: To kill Corta! To try to beat the life out of this man who had dared to do what he did. Willis had acted so swiftly and he was so close to Corta, that there was no one who could prevent him in his purpose. Corta threw up his hands in a futile gesture. But Willis broke through the man's guard as if the arms were of paper.

Willis threw his punches in short, devastating, dynamite-laden bursts. One blow split Corta's lips wide open. Another spread his nose across his face. Before the surprised guards got to Willis, he had almost accomplished what he had set out to do. But a gun butt crashed down on the back of his skull and put an end to the one-sided battle.

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Willis sank to his knees. He put his hands on the ground and started to get up. A booted foot caught him full in the face. Blood poured in a crimson flood from his mouth. He heard, as from a great distance, a woman scream. Then the boot took him on the side of his jaw and blackness rolled over him in an obliterating tide.

WILLIS opened eyelids that seemed glued. An intolerable ache possessed his whole body. He had the strangest feeling that his head was not attached to him at all. For it seemed to possess a life of its own. He felt it roll and swing on a neck that was made of rubber. He grinned crookedly at the thought. Then sanity returned and he saw and felt where he was. He was hanging head downward from the saddle of a horse in motion.

The ground rose and fell in uneven jerks. And with every movement of the trotting horse, something twisted and burned in his belly. Willis knew that he had been kicked there. He hoped that there were no internal injuries.

How long he had been unconscious he didn't know. But that it had been for a long time he was sure. For the blood had clotted on his chin and in the nostrils.

He turned his head upward and saw that the sun was already on its path to the horizon. Then a fist struck him on the back of the neck and a voice said something in a language he didn't understand. But there was no doubting the meaning of the words. The horseman wanted Willis to remain quiet.

The blow had made Willis dizzy. He hung head downward in a state that was like a coma for a long time after that. Nor did he come to when they arrived at their destination.

It wasn't until they had flung him, still bound, into a hut with Mike, that he became a little more conscious of his surroundings. He opened his eyes and saw that Mike was rubbing his wrists to restore circulation. Laboriously, Willis sat erect, The first thing he asked through swollen and lacerated lips was:

"The girl. What happened to her?"

"Take it easy, lad," Mike counselled as he continued to massage the swollen wrists. "She'll be all right."

"To hell with that!" Willis said savagely. "Answer me!"

"Okay, pal. They've got her in a house somewhere in this town. Some women are with her. And I heard Corta tell them to watch her. And to make sure she was taken care of. I've got an idea that he's going to handle her with kid gloves from now on. I noticed several of his men give him dirty looks, when he slapped her."

Willis arose, groaning loudly in the effort it took. Then shaking himself, much as a dog would, he flexed his arms and swiveled from the waist. Sweat broke out on his face. Mike watched the performance with interest.

"Got to see if my insides are all right," Willis explanied. "I suppose they gave me the boots when I was down."

"You're supposing right," Mike said, his eyes bleak at the memory. "They gave it to you, but plenty."

WILLIS grinned. It was more of a grotesque imitation of a grin. For his lips were swollen to twice their normal size. And one side of his face was swollen out of proportion. But in his eyes was a something that Mike had never seen before.

"So they win the first round," Willis said. "But the fight's got a long way to go yet. I've never been stopped by a beating. And for sure, not in this case."

"Miss Smith," Mike observed slyly,

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"has sort of got you on the ropes, eh?"

Willis colored. Was it so apparent? Well, to hell with it! What if he had fallen for her! It wasn't anybody's business but his own. Then he saw the grin on Mike's face and knew that the Irishman had only been ribbing him. And when Mike came over and patted him on the back, he knew that the man approved.

"How do you feel, lad?" Mike asked.

"A little rocky," Willis said. "But I'll be all right in a little while. Just so long as my insides are all right. And I think they are. . . . Well, let's see what sort of a dump they got us in."

It wasn't much, from what they could see. The walls were plastered white, which told them it was an adobe hut. There were two windows, without panes. The floor was of earth packed down hard. A couple of moth-eaten blankets, dirt encrusted, lay in a corner.

Willis, Mike at his side, walked to the open door. Instantly a guard, carbine in hand, moved in front of them. He was a little man and the sombrero he wore almost hid completely the small face. But there was no mistaking the menace of the rifle. They walked back into the room. Mike sat down, leaning his back against the wall. But Willis moved over to one of the windows.

Outside, Willis saw that there was another guard. It was evident that Corta was taking no chance on their escaping. Willis was surprised at the sight of the number of houses he could see from the window. This was a town of some size.

"Might as well rest," Mike said from his corner. "It looks like we'll be here for a time anyway. And I might as well ask you a few questions, now that we're alone. Not that it'll do any good." His voice was non-commital. "But we might as well get things straight between us. And this is a good time."

WILLIS joined him and waited for for the other to begin.

"You said," Mike began, "that you thought I was a Federal man. Well that's not quite so. But for all practical purposes I am. Only in an unofficial capacity. You see, this damned movement, the Pan-Archista, has its tentacles in the States. So our government, in co-operation with the Mexican, has a number of agents here. So far, none of us have been able to do more than break through the surface of this thing.

"Then, on the boat, you give me a new lead. Not much, because you're a close-mouthed guy. But enough. You mentioned you were on the trail of this robe of the feathered serpent when you were shanghied. That's why I decided to join you in looking for this Pepe. The Pan-Archista's use the feathered serpent as a symbol, like the Germans used to use the Swastika. . . .

"But when Corta got us, you accused him of being crazy. Hiring you to find the girl, you said, and then coming down here to get her himself. Explain, bright boy, explain."

"Okay," Willis said. "I guess you deserve an explanation. Here's what happened." Then he told how he came into the case. "But," he said in conclusion, "when I got down to the museum, the man in charge of the exhibit didn't know there was anything wrong. Oh, I'll admit it would have been foolish to let the public know of the loss, especially after Dr. Lorenz explained that he didn't want any publicity on it. But I know human nature pretty well. And I'd take an oath on it that the guide was sincere in his belief. Then who told Lorenz that the robe was missing?

"I tell you, Mike, when I found that out, I wanted to call the whole thing off and give them back the two grand.

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In fact, I had decided to do just that when this Corta guy walked into my office. All he wanted was the girl.

"That got me interested, but good. One guy wants a robe, another wants the girl. And even offers a terrific bonus if I bring the girl to him. It was only natural that I want to see this girl. I did. And where's it got me?" he added in disgust.

"I'm afraid not very far," Mike answered. "Still—you were alone with her up there. Didn't she say anything when you asked her about the robe?"

"No," Willis said. "Before I had a chance to ask her, this Toclezuma came up and went through his mumbo-jumbo. So I'm still in the dark."

Mike shook his head in commiseration. "Too bad," he said. "We might have had this puzzle solved."

"A lot of good that'd do us," Willis said in reminder. "It looks like we're in the jug for good, if I know my villains. And believe me I do!"

JUST before dark, it became evident that something was afoot. Mounted men came galloping by, each brandishing a carbine and shouting at the top of his lungs. Willis saw squat-shaped women come to the doorways and look fearfully at the horsemen. Then several armed men came into their hut and while some of them held Willis and Mike at bay with their guns, the rest bound them and shoved them against the wall.

A feeling of foreboding took hold of Willis. He didn't like what was happening. Not that he had any idea of what was going on. But it just didn't smell right. Not only that but he had an idea that the girl was in this strange exodus of armed men.

It grew dark. The moon came up and it was the only light they had. Willis surmised that they had been taken to a place on the outskirts of town, since there seemed to be no street lights. Every now and then, they saw the figure of a sentry pacing back and forth past the doorway. The only sounds they heard were the creaking of the leather on his rifle sling, when he shifted it from shoulder to shoulder, and the soft pad of his sandals in the dirt of the path.

It wasn't long before their bonds began to chaff the skin of their wrists.

"Damn!" Willis burst out finally. "See if you can't get at this rope, Mike."

He rolled until he lay with his back against Mike's. He could feel Mike fumbling at the rope—then Mike's voice said:

"Uh uh. Some cowboy must have tied these knots. Can't work them loose." Despite the certainty in his words, he tried again. But it was as unavailing as was his first effort.

"See what you can do with mine," he suggested.

Willis' fingers fumbled about for a moment. He saw the reason for Mike's failure. The rope had been greased and it was next to impossible to work the knots loose.

They lay in hopeless silence and waited with as much patience as they had for whatever was to be.

How long their vigil lasted, they didn't know. There was no clock to tell the time. But hours must have passed. Suddenly a storm of firing broke out. They listened, tense and expectant, wondering at the cause. At first it was far away and sounded like thunder at a distance. Then the individual sounds of the arms became distinguishable. There was the short rapid bursts of machine guns, the single whinning sounds of rifle fire, and now and then the sound of a cannon's full-throated roar.

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THEN they saw the nerve-chilling glow of a conflagration. Just an orange glow at the edge of their visual limit, it spread until the whole hut was illuminated by the glare. The sound of firing came closer. And mixed with it was a human sound: the collective cry of a people in panic—the screams of women and men in pain; the cries of children; and the bestial roar of men in the passion of conflict.

"Mike!" Willis cried in an agony of suspense. "What do you think's going on?"

"Sounds like Corta has given the town over to his men."

"God!" Willis breathed. Then he began a frantic and futile tearing at his bonds. The skin, already chaffed by his previous unavailing efforts, began to burn intolerably. He disregarded the pain and redoubled his efforts. Mike, too, was twisting and turning; it seemed as if he were trying to stand on his head so wildly did he thresh about in his struggle to loosen the knots. But at the end, both men lay back in exhaustion, beaten.

Nearer and nearer came the fury of the battle. More and more of the wooden framed shacks fell before the roaring furnace blast of the fire. Now the glow was so bright they could see each other's face clearly. And on each was the same expression: a wild and furious mingling of anger and terror.

Then a number of men burst into their hut. Each was armed and it was too evident that they were either drunk or so emotionally unbalanced by passion that they didn't even look human.

The leader, a small weasel-faced man, was armed with a sub-machine gun. The rest had either rifles or pistols. They formed a silent half circle around the two bound men. Spittle drooled from the lips of the leader. Strange animal-like sounds came from his throat. Willis and Mike looked with ill-concealed horror at the rest. Their purpose was only too evident. They were a self-appointed firing squad. Either that, or Corta had left instructions for them to execute the two Americans when his men had done with the town.

Slowly—a slowness that was deliberate—they raised their weapons. The black mouths of the rifles bore on the two defenseless men, tied and unable to offer resistance. Willis saw Weasel-face lick his lips, saw him open his mouth to utter the command that would send death winging their way.

THEN the room was filled with the sound of gunfire. Before the startled and bewildered eyes of Willis and Mike, their would-be executioners began to fall, silent in instant death or screaming in pain as lead bit into their vitals. The last to fall was Weasel-face. Willis saw that the bullets had practically torn his head from his shoulders. The whole thing hadn't taken more than a few seconds.

From the shadows beyond the door, Pepe, a machine-pistol held snugly in the crook of his arm, appeared. There was a broad grin on his face. He was alone.

Then grin broadened until it seemed to cover his whole face. Then pushing his sombrero back until it was resting on the back of his head, he said:

"Well, amigos, let's escram from here, eh?"

Then there was a knife in his fingers and the ropes fell away. It took a few seconds for the men to bring the circulation back to their hands. Then they followed Pepe out into the inferno of the street. Already the spreading flames had marched across the length of the town until they were consuming the structures a street away.

Pepe had disappeared around the

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rear of the hut. They followed him and saw he was waiting by the side of a black sedan. At the wheel was a hawk-faced man, so young looking that at first glance they took him for a boy. Then they saw that it was the lack of beard which gave the mistaken idea of youth.

Pepe sat up front with the driver. No sooner had they gotten into the car, then it started off with a terrific burst of speed. Willis and Mike were thrown together as the car took corners on two wheels at full speed. And almost before they were aware of the fact, they were out upon a narrow ribbon of highway.

The driver hunched over the wheel, his eyes riveted on the moon-lighted road. At his side, Pepe watched with narrowed eyes through the rear view mirror. Willis saw that the road curved in a wide sweep, burrowing upward between a straight overhang of rock. Now and then the curve took them to the very edge of the road. At such times, Willis held his breath as the driver took those curves at the same breakneck speed. He had to marvel at the man's nerve.

Willis began to wonder at Pepe's continued watchfulness. He looked back to learn what it was that made Pepe keep his eyes glued to the rear view mirror. Then he saw it: twin streamers of light from far in their rear.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Maybe so," Pepe answered. "Look in the case in the back. Rifles and pistols there. Don't let that car come too close," he said.

Mike snapped the catch of the case attached to the front seat and took out a rifle and pistol for each of them. Then they noticed that there were apertures through the rear windows so the barrel of a rifle could be inserted. They lost no time in pushing the barrels through.

AS FAST as was their car, the other was faster. The pursuing lights grew brighter, closer until only a hundred yards separated them. The roar of Mike's gun almost deafened Willis in the close confines of the car. Then he, too, let loose a blast from his rifle.

He aimed high at first, between the lights. Then as he saw his shots seemed to have no effect, he tried for the tires. Now there was answering fire from the other car. Bullets smacked against the steel of the body and whined off into the night. Glass starred before Willis' eyes, but did not break.

"Bullet proof," Mike murmured as he continued to fire slowly and methodically.

Now the other car was only a few feet off. The driver was steering it alongside.

"To hell with this!" Willis grunted as he hurriedly yanked the window down.

They were racing even, now, and he could distinctly see three men, in the other car. Two of them were at the window parallel to his. It was open and the ugly snouts of two automatic pistols were leveled in his direction. One of them swung toward the driver, just as Willis let loose a blast of fire from his pistol.

The two men disappeared as if by magic. Willis had a glimpse of the driver, his face turned toward Willis, momentarily, then Willis fired once more. And the driver slumped forward against the wheel. For the barest instant the other car held level with theirs. Then it skidded off toward the edge of the road . . . and over.

Their hawk-faced driver applied the brakes and they heard, above the skid of their tires, the crash of the other car as it struck a projecting ledge, then continued downward to the accompaniment of a succession of smaller crashing

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sounds till it reached the bottom of the gorge, a couple of hundred feet below.

Willis released the sigh that had been trembling on his lips when he saw the car take its plunge. He shuddered at the thought of the men trapped within it. But Pepe's face was aglow with satisfaction when he turned to say:

"Wonderful shooting, my friend."

"Yes," Willis answered dryly. "I've had plenty of practice at it."

The driver started the car off again. Now the mood of the occupants was different from before. It was as if the running gun battle had given them a strange sense of exhilaration. The tenseness disappeared from their faces and an air of jovial ease came upon them.

"Say," Mike said in admiration, "where did you learn to shoot like that?"

"Spent a year in Arizona. An old-timer up there showed me how to use a pistol. Man, oh man, how that old guy could shoot!"

"I thought for a time it was 'kingdom come,' for us when those guys drove up. Wonder who they were?"

"Guess Pepe knows. How about that, Pepe?"

Pepe had rolled the window down, now that danger had passed. He turned and spat through the opened window and said:

"Bad, bad men." His voice expressed sorrow that such could have existed. Then he smiled broadly and added, "Look like they go to—hot place, eh?"

"Yeah," Willis said in solemn agreement. "Bad men, all right. And they went to hot place. But what gets me is, how did you find us? And where did you go to the other morning?"

PEPE rolled his eyes and shrugged his broad shoulders in a knowing gesture.

"Oh," he said casually, "I have business to do. Come back an' find you gone, know where you go. Come to place where is fight, know what happen. Then I get car and Miguellito and come look for you." Then, in after thought: "Me find. Lucky you."

"Lucky us, is right," Mike answered in lazy tones. "And this business of *knowing* where we were. How come you know so much, Pepe?"

"Pepe smart," was the simple answer. "Know that Corta—" he spat on mentioning the name—"have place in Larida. Know he goin' Mexico Ecity, today. Big demonstration there—Pan Archistas. Corta have to lead parade, so I figure he take Ix—Mees Smith to Larida. Not find you and Mike. So you must be in Larida, too. Esimple, no?"

"Yes," Mike agreed.

"But the car," Willis persisted. "From the way you people used horses, I thought they were the only means of transportation. Where did you get an *armored* car?"

Pepe winked as if he were completely taken with his own cleverness. "Oh," he said in explanation, "we smart too. Smarter than Corta think. He gonna be surprised."

"I'll bet," Mike said softly. "But how did you know the exact place where to look for us, Pepe?"

"Not all Corta's men what you call members of party, Pepe said. Then, "better sleep now. Long ride to Mexico Ecity. I wake you."

Willis fell asleep almost instantly.

HE OPENED his eyes and looked through the window. It was afternoon. In the distance, but not far off, he saw the tops of a number of tall buildings. Mexico City. Then he looked about him. They were in the midst of high mountains. Towering peaks reached snow caps to the sky. The air

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was cool but dry. Willis felt a wonderful sense of exhilaration. Whether it was the air or the excitement of the chase, he didn't know. But his very finger tips were tingling in expectation of things to come. Then they were on comparatively level ground and the city was rushing to meet them.

Willis saw that Pepe was dozing in the front seat. But the driver looked as grim and wide-awake as ever.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Mike murmured drowsily.

"Sure is," Willis replied.

Willis noticed that traffic had increased to something like what it was in the States. Cars passed them at frequent intervals, going in the opposite direction. And now and then a car would whiz by, as if the driver was racing against time. Here and there, other roads intersected theirs. Willis saw a sign warning of one such intersection, and then, a few hundred yards ahead, the junction.

They were only a few yards away, when a car raced out of the intersecting road. Miguellito didn't see it until too late. Willis saw him twist frantically at the steering wheel. He barely had time to brace himself when the other car struck them. Yet in the second before they met, he saw the other driver's face and noticed the look of unholy joy it bore. It was a planned accident.

Even above the tortured scream of rending metal, Willis thought that Pepe was not as smart as he had believed.

Then there was a last final crash as the car settled on its side.

WILLIS felt a heavy weight pressing up on him. His face was buried in the cushions. Panic held him in its grip for a second. Then he heard a voice groan in his ear and knew that the something pinning him down was a man. There was a muffled booming sound from somewhere close by. But Willis was only interested in getting rid of the weight. Bracing his legs against the side of the car, he heaved upward and felt the weight slide off. Then he twisted around and saw that it was Mike who had been lying on him.

The car was on its side. Willis found it impossible to maneuver so that he could reach the door. For a second he thought that they were trapped in the car, then there was the squeal of protesting steel and the door on the far side swung wide and a pale, frightened face looked down at him.

"C'mon," Willis cried savagely. "Help get these men out."

Willing hands reached in and pulled them out one by one. The driver was dead from a broken neck. Pepe was knocked out, blood streaming from a long cut on his forehead. Mike lay groaning beside Willis, who seemed to be the least injured of them all. Willis got to his feet and, disregarding the excited questions of the half-dozen motorists who had pulled their cars up on seeing the accident, bent over first Mike and then Pepe.

He saw that Mike had the wind knocked from him. But Pepe looked to be in bad shape. He couldn't tell from the superficial examination he was able to give, how bad the injuries were, but the gash on his forehead seemed most alarming.

Mike rolled over and got to his feet. He shook his head, as though to free it from the daze he was in. Then he joined Willis beside Pepe.

"Better get him to a hospital," he suggested.

One of the men nodded his head in agreement and they lifted Pepe into the stranger's car. They paid no attention to the other car which was blazing a few yards down the road.

Mike sat up front with the driver

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while Willis held Pepe firm in the back seat.

"I told him to stop off at the nearest doctor's," Mike said in explanation.

It didn't take more than ten minutes and they were in the suburbs of Mexico City. Just as they reached a residential section, Pepe opened his eyes.

"Amigos—" his voice was a thin thread of sound—"you go—go—" He stopped and looked at Mike with entreaty in his eyes. "You know the ecity?" he asked.

Mike nodded.

A small smile illuminated Pepe's broad face.

"Good," he breathed. "On Avenida Zapatlan, where it come to Plaza—is *fotografia* place." He reached into his trouser pocket and pulled something from it. "Give this to who comes to ask," he said, and handed what he'd pulled out to Willis. It was a wooden representation of the feathered serpent.

He paused to gain strength and continued, "Say Pepe send." Then he closed his eyes as though he desired sleep. But his labored breathing gave the lie to that.

THE brakes on the car squealed as it came to a quick stop. A shingle on the door of the house before which the driver had pulled up bore the legend that this was the residence of a doctor.

They carried Pepe in and waited for the doctor to make his examination.

The doctor shook his head in anticipation of their questions.

"Can't say," he said, speaking in English. "Might be concussion. Best have him removed to a hospital."

Mike reached into a pocket and pulled out a roll of bills, tendered several of them to the doctor, saying:

"Take care of it, will you, Doctor? And see that he gets the best of care."

They left at the doctor's assurance that he would see that everything possible was done.

The car that had brought them was no longer at the front of the house. It was evident the driver had thought he had done all that was possible for him to under the circumstances and had not waited for anything else.

Mike walked to the end of the block and looked up at the street sign.

"H'm," he grunted. "We're lucky we came in at this end of town. The Avenida Zapatlan's only a few blocks down."

The street they took curved after a few blocks. Mike kept a constant lookout for the street of their destination. Then they arrived at a small plaza, a park-like square of small tropical trees and a dozen benches. They crossed the plaza and started up the street on the other side.

Mike turned right, at the end of the block, and explained:

"Two more blocks."

Then, as a series of loud noises came to them, they stopped and looker wonderingly at each other. There was no mistaking the sounds. They were made by the firing of guns.

They had noticed the peculiarly deserted appearance of the streets. Now they understood why. Gunfire meant one of several things, none of them good. Then a great crowd of people debouched on their street from a number of other streets. And at the rear of the crowd, Willis saw the mounted figures of men.

THEY didn't wait for the crowd to reach them. Turning, they started at full speed for the park they had just left . . . and ran full into the path of another mob of people, coming around the corner of the street they had just crossed. They were caught in the mob and in a second Willis and Mike were

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separated.

The mob was insensate with fear. Willis found himself irresistably borne forward on the crest of the first hundred elements. Lowering his head, he charged into the thinnest part of the fear-crazed ranks.

He bulled forward until he had reached the dubious sanctuary of a wall. Panting, he leaned against it and watched, in horror what was taking place. From the direction opposite of the one from which Mike and Willis had come, there came the clatter of horses. Willis saw that there were uniformed cavalrymen in the saddles. They were charging the crowd with drawn sabers, just as were cavalrymen from the other end. The crowd was caught between two fires.

A torn paper banner fluttered to the ground in front of him, and he recognized two of the words printed on it. Pan-Archista. So this was what had happened to the demonstration Corta had planned! The government had, it was all too evident, taken a hand in suppressing it. But, Willis wondered, what had happened to make the troops so bloodthirsty?

He wasn't aware that he had been sliding along the wall until a section of it slid open and a hand reached out and pulled him into the cool interior of a hallway.

A feminine voice murmured liquid questions in his ear. He saw, when his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness, that a young woman was his companion. He shook his head to her questions and said the few Spanish words he knew:

"No habla Espanol."

He saw her teeth flash white at his words.

"Americano?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

There was a pause in the talk as a strange sound filled the narrow, dark hall. It was the horror-filled sound of men and women in an agony of fear.

"Quickly," the girl said in English. "Come this way."

She took him by the hand and led him down the hall to a room at the end of it. This room held more light than the hall. Two windows, curtained and shuttered, permitted a faint glimmer of sun to penetrate through the folds of cloth.

The girl opened a door and shoving him through, said:

"Over the wall. The street beyond is free of troops."

Grinning his thanks, Willis hastened to clamber over the wall of the courtyard. It was just as she had said. The street beyond was free of troops. Willis didn't wait for anything. He started off at a run.

Where he was going, he didn't know. Only that his path led away from the madness of the street he had just left. It wasn't until he was out of earshot of the terrible noises, that he remembered Mike was back there. For an instant he started to turn back, then saw the folly of such a move. For even if he were able to get back, he had no guarantee that the Irishman would be there and that he could find him.

NOW he was in a business section of some sort. Shops lined the wide street. He saw a theater, then another. But the strange emptiness he had noticed on the other streets also prevailed here. Not a person was to be seen. Not a street car moved, although there were several in sight, all of them empty. Willis wondered where the people had disappeared to.

He continued on, this time at a more sedate walk. Suddenly from a side street several armored cars shot out.

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The ugly muzzles of machine guns protruded from gun ports at the sides and tops of the vehicles. They clattered by on rubber-tired caterpillar treads. Several minutes later a number of armored scout cars followed. In each, a half-dozen soldiers sat, rifles held at the ready.

Willis decided to try one of the side streets. It led to trouble. For no sooner did he go a block than he walked straight into a demonstration of some sort. Men on soap boxes were haranguing a crowd. At intervals, bellows of rage would greet something one of them said. Willis tried to edge out of it. But people continued to hem him in.

The speakers were in a sort of triangle formed by the intersection of three streets. Willis saw that a space was cleared in front of them. A number of armed men were standing guard.

A number of cars sped by and from each came the clatter of machine-gun fire. The crowd broke and ran in every direction, Willis along with the rest. Another group of cars came along and again the machine-gun fire. A man ahead of Willis stumbled and fell to his face. In the second he passed him, Willis saw that he was dead. Bullets struck the pavement in front of him and ricochetted off.

He was on a long, tree-lined thoroughfare. Drawn up across the entire width of the street were khaki-clad troops. Willis turned dazed eyes to the rear and saw that a like number of troops were drawn up at the other end of the avenue. It was an impasse from which there was no escape. And to make matters worse, machine guns were set up facing the fear-ridden mob.

Men detached themselves from the ranks and, rifles held ready, began to approach the mob. Willis watched them approach. He felt a distinct feeling of gratitude that it was all over. He was tired of this wild and purposeless running. His glance strayed upward until it encountered a street sign overhead. It read, Paseo De la Reforma.

CHAPTER VI

"HEY, jailer," Willis shouted.

A series of cat-calls came back in reply.

Once more Willis shouted for the jailer. Again came the Spanish equivalent of an American bronx cheer. Willis turned away from the iron-barred gate and regarded his cellmates in undisguised disgust.

There were thirty of them in the cell. Most were of the poorer class, unwashed, unshaved and unashamed of their incarceration. In fact, they thought it was almost funny being cooped up this way.

When their soldier escort had brought them here, in several large army trucks, they had screamed, laughed and shouted throughout the entire ride. All, that is, except Willis. At first, he had tried to convince the guard that he was an innocent bystander. But the man had looked into Willis' unshaven face, begrimed with several days' dirt and had turned away from him.

They had been brought to an immense, gray-stone building. There they had waited until several more trucks pulled up, bearing the rest of the members of the demonstration. Then, still under the guard of the armed soldiery, they had been marched into the jail.

Most of his cell-mates lay about and slept. Some sat and talked over, in low tones, the events of the day. Two of them kept Willis company at the door.

Willis had about given up hope, when one of the sleepers awakened. He was as ragged-looking as the rest, but when he came nearer, Willis saw

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that, beneath the dirt, the man was blond.

"No use yelling that way, matey," the man said, yawning broadly.

"No?" Willis asked shortly. "Why?"

"The bloomin' turnkey can't understand you, that's why."

"Ah!" Willis gave up in disgust. "What the hell's the use?"

"Don't feel so bad," the other said, and hid another yawn behind a filthy palm. "We'll be outa here by mornin'."

Willis was aghast at the thought. It was unthinkable that he must spend another eight or ten hours in this stinking, vermin-infested place.

"But I've got to get out of here," he said. There was almost a plea in his voice.

"Yeah?" The other looked at him in bright-eyed amusement. "Why, got a date with a bim at Butch's?" He looked disparagingly at Willis' bedraggled appearance and laughed loudly at his own wit.

"No," Willis said softly. "It's a hell of a lot more important than any dame. At Butch's anyway."

THE other turned and started away, saying, "Well, it's the dinero that counts here." He stopped suddenly when Willis said in reply:

"If I could only get word to Corta . . ."

"What you say?" the other said turning on his heel and coming back. There was a sharp look in his narrow-set, bright eyes.

"I said I've got to get word to Corta," Willis repeated.

"Which one?"

Willis pivoted away from his dismal inspection of the corridor.

"What do you mean, which one?"

"Just what I said, which one?"

There was something expectant in the man's voice that gave Willis a sudden surge of hope.

"The one who lives on Reforma Boulevard," he said softly.

A low whistle of surprise came from the blond's lips. "Why didn't you say so?" he asked. Then, "Got any dough?"

"No," Willis said sadly. "But I'd have plenty, once I got to him."

The blonde went through his pockets, pulling out several crumpled bills.

"Twenty pesos," he said musingly. "Ought to be enough." He shoved Willis away from the door and began to call loudly in Spanish. His shouts brought results. In a few seconds the jailer appeared. He was a short fat man, dressed in sweat-stained trousers which had once been tan but were now a sort of muddy brown. He was completely bald and his shaven head gleamed with sweat. A dirty undershirt covered a hairy chest.

Upon seeing who had called, he started to turn back, but the blond stopped him. Calling him close to the bars, he held him in low-voiced conversation. Willis saw the blond show the jailer the bills. The fat man shook his head when he saw them, then there was more talk. Finally the jailer took the money and, opening the door, let Willis and the blond through.

Willis looked about him in amazement. Only a few hours before, the city had seemed deserted. Now the streets were alive with people. The shops were open. Street cars were running and had full loads of passengers. He saw a line before a theater.

The blond guessed correctly the reason for his bewildered air.

"Got to get used to it," he said, smiling. "Things were different a few years ago. Now we got a gang of guys trying to make trouble. And the poor jerks who live here can't know when things will pop. So one minute there's

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crowds; the next, the town looks dead."

He hailed a passing cab, got in with Willis and gave Corta's address.

HERNANDO CORTA lived in an imposing mansion. Two uniformed sentries stood guard before the narrow driveway that led to an iron-barred door.

The guards challenged Willis and his new found friend as they stepped from the cab. The blond went into a heated discussion with the guards, but they proved less flexible than the jailer had been. Or perhaps it was that there wasn't any money. At last the blond convinced one of them that he should take in Willis' name. Willis went through an agony of waiting during the few minutes it took for the guard to return, Corta with him.

Corta didn't look as Willis remembered him. There was an expression of strain about his face. Furrows extended the width of the forehead. Even the moustache seemed to droop. But there was no mistake. It was Corta. And despite the change in Willis' appearance, Corta recognized him immediately. And Willis was glad to see that the other was happy to see him. Corta took Willis by the arm and started for the door. Willis felt a tug at his other arm and, looking around, saw the blond-haired man, entreaty in his eyes, silently begging for Willis not to forget him.

"Look, Corta," Willis said. "Have you any money with you?"

Without a word, Corta pulled a wallet from his pocket and extracting several bills, gave them to Willis. The blond's eyes went wide, as he saw the denomination of the bill Willis handed him. It was a single hundred-dollar bill. Wordlessly he made off in the direction of the jail.

Willis followed Corta into a long, high-ceiling room that seemed to be lined with books. Thick velvet drapes hung in protection across the deep windows. At the far end of the room was a desk and, standing by the desk, three men. Two of them were strangers; the third Willis recognized immediately, even through the blood caking his face. It was Mike.

They shook hands warmly, though silently.

"You know Mr. Hearn?" Corta asked Willis.

"Know him? Why we're practically brothers, after what we've gone through together."

"Good!" Corta seemed pleased at the way things were turning out. "Then let me introduce you to General Gonzales, and to Mr. Zamanta, our Secretary of State."

The General was a tall, handsome-looking man of distinguished appearance. His handshake was strong and cordial. Then Willis turned to Zamanta and was surprised to see that he was an Indian.

Corta got down to business immediately.

"It is almost miraculous that you appear the very moment you are needed most."

Willis looked his surprise.

"Mike—" Corta gave Hearn a look of affection—" has told us of your adventures. All that is in the past. More important things are in the offing. And we will need your services, Willis, if what you have been through has not altered your view?"

"What do you mean—my view?"

"In regards to money," Corta said.

Willis' eyes and voice were glacial.

"Look," he began, "forget about the dough! I've been beat up, shot at, thrown in jail and been made a fool of! And now I'm mad! Now let's get down to cases. Give me the lowdown on all

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this, including the business about your brother."

ZAMANTA'S coal-black eyes flickered in Willis' direction. There was something impressive in this American's cold anger, he thought.

"Good!" Corta said enthusiastically, "I will come directly to the point. Mike told you of this new and vicious movement that has been plaguing us. It was fomented by my brother, who by the way is an identical twin. So! Now, why I came to you in the first place: This girl I wanted you to bring to me —Miss Smith—is the key to the whole situation. I cannot give you the whole history of the Pan-Archistas. But the cornerstone on which it was founded, is that there are living today the reincarnated beings of the ancient Aztecs."

Willis felt his chin drop. This was as impossible to believe as a fairy tale.

"Your disbelief is understandable," Corta said. "Nevertheless, that is what has come to pass. Further, my brother, who can claim direct descendency from Hernado Cortez, has done all in his power to bring the people to his way of thinking. And what is he after, this mad brother of mine?

"It begins with the old cry: Mexico for the Mexicans. Yet if there were only that to contend with, the matter would not be so difficult. He wants a return to the old days, the days of the Aztecs. That is where the girl comes in. Somehow, whether it was the Indians who are at the head of the other group, or whether it was my brother who did the talking, she has been convinced that *she is the daughter of Montezuma.*"

"Whew!" Willis let out his breath in a long sigh. He suddenly remembered the scene in the adobe house where Pepe had brought them. And also the significance of what he had seen in Galveston.

Sadly, Corta shook his head, as he thought of this sad state of affairs.

"You see, Willis," he continued, "ninety per cent of Mexico is Indian. They are suspicious, illiterate and ignorant. And despite all that the government has done to educate them, they still look with suspicion upon all efforts to provide them with a better way of living. It is in their direction that the Pan-Archista propaganda has been directed. And with a great measure of success. This demonstration in which you were caught is an example. It is an almost daily occurrence. Luckily, today we were prepared to some degree. Otherwise serious trouble might have occurred. For my brother let it be known, that Ixanthlu, herself, was to appear in the demonstration."

ZAMANTA, who had maintained a dignified silence through all the talk, suddenly spoke up at this point:

"And who suffers because of all this? The Indian, the very one for whose benefit years of labor and research has been given. Hearn told us of what took place at Larida. Such scenes of horror are becoming commonplace. And who is given the blame? The Indian, again. What is worse and what makes for aggravated feelings in reponsible quarters, is that there is just enough truth in the vile structure to make for an appearance of unified revolt. There have been cases where the Indians have been given to pillage—and worse. And if there is not an end to this condition soon, I don't know what will come of it."

Corta turned to General Gonzales and said:

"And now, General, will you tell Willis your side of the story?"

It was instantly apparent that Gonzales was not the speaker Zamanta was.

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Nor did he have the other's command of English. But of his sincerity there was no doubt.

He began hesitantly: "My part is what—shall we say . . . Excuse me. To talk, is hard for me. So. I am of the military. As so, it is my duty to put down revolt, whether it real or pretend. When Headquarters say in the state of Sonora is revolt, I, as General in charge of fourth district—what is Sonora—has to go in field and put down insurrection.

"It is not new to me. I am not so young I look. But always before there was reasons for revolt. Sometimes good, sometimes bad. But my duty is always put down. Mexico has vote. People can say in polls what they want.

"That is from political. What concerns me is my duty. I go. And what do I find? A few miserable peons, some ignorant and drunk Indians. Of these, revolts are not make. And everywhere I go, same thing. Drunk peons and Indians." He shook his head at the memory of what he had found.

"Then, one time, my men bring leader of these *revolutionistas*. And he tell me of something I never hear before. He very drunk, so I do not believe. But now . . . so he tell of city call Chihuatlan. Talk of Aztec high priest, Toclezuma. Of Ixanthlu, daughter of Montezuma. Of feathered serpent. And when he speak of serpent, he make it sound real. But, like I say, he is drunk. So I throw him in jail and forget. Next morning, guard find him dead. But of wound, no!

"I return and tell *El Presidente*. Then he send me to Senor Corta."

"I suppose you wonder how all this concerns you, eh, Willis?" Corta asked at the conclusion of the General's explanation.

"Yes."

"Because of something Hearn has told me, you may be the answer to our problem."

"Something Mike said about me?"

"Yes. You told him of this Toclezuma meeting you and what he said, did you not? And that he called you Tlixo? And that you were ready for something?"

"Right."

"Well, it is my opinion that where your party was bound was the city of Chihuatlan."

Willis felt the irritating desire to shake what Corta had in mind out of him, so slow was his manner of telling.

"Go on," he said, shortly.

Corta was not to be rushed.

"Well, you heard General Gonzales tell that this rebel leader also mentioned that name. But the strange thing about it is, that there is no such city, as far as we've been able to learn."

"You mean the whole thing's just a gag?"

"N-no. More probable that they call another and more well known city by that name. Now we come to you."

Willis felt like voicing a cheer.

"Do you still have that image Pepe gave to you?"

WILLIS looked to Mike, then reached into his pocket and pulled out the object in question.

Corta looked at the thing with undisguised curiosity. Then he handed it to Zamanta, who also gave it a thorough examination while the General peered over the Indian's shoulder.

"There is no doubt of it," Zamanta said, returning the curio to Willis. "Genuine Aztec work and quite recent. I can only speculate on where it came from and who made it."

Corta nodded as if satisfied with what he heard, then said:

"Here is what we want you to do, Willis. Go to the address Pepe gave

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you and present this, as you were told to do. Mike will accompany you. Then you will let matters take their course. Only now, you will be acting as an agent of the Mexican government.

"I have been granted extraordinary powers in this emergency. And so I can guarantee you the entire support of all the Mexican law agencies."

He turned and took something from the top of the desk and gave it to Willis. It was small metal disk, bearing the seal of Mexico on its smooth surface. And below the seal, in small letters, a single Spanish word. Willis looked questioningly at Corta.

"That word and seal will identify you to any law enforcement officer, if the time comes when you may need help."

"Fair enough," Willis said.

"Now you and Mike will go to this photographer's. But you had better wash and refresh yourself first."

Willis felt the need of food. And while a servant brought a hot meal to him, Corta summoned his personal physician, who examined Willis bruised face.

"Superficial bruises, which time will heal," Corta announced the doctor's diagnosis.

Then, after Willis had taken a bath and got back into the stained and torn clothes he had been wearing, he and Mike took leave of Corta.

IT WAS a narrow wooden-framed building. On one side, where it fronted on the Avenida Zapatlan, the upper story was of glass. And across the front of the store, in letters of gilt, was the legend, Simon Garcia, *Fotografias.*

Willis opened the door and entered, Mike at his heels.

A slender, dapper Mexican, wearing the thinnest and most waxed moustache Willis had ever seen, greeted them. The smell of the perfume he was wearing was overpowering in its intensity. He took one look at the disreputable looking pair, sniffed and started for the rear again.

"Just a minute, bud," Willis said, and stopped. He had spoken in English and remembered that this nancy-looking guy probably did not understand the language. Mike came to his rescue.

The effeminate clerk listened, but only with an air that said, why must I be bothered with this sort of riff-raff? Brusquely he gave Mike an answer that made red creep up into the Irishman's neck. Mike controlled himself with a visible effort. Then he roared something at the man which made the other shrink away in panic from the two.

"Show the jerk that image," Mike growled at Willis, "before I lose my temper and take a poke at him."

The clerk's eyes went wide when he saw the small wooden disk Willis displayed. There was something akin to terror in his manner, as he turned and disappeared into the rear of the shop. He returned in a moment with the proprietor.

The owner of the shop was as much of a character as the clerk he employed. He appeared more as a member of the clergy than a photographer, even to the turned collar. And to make the illusion of sobriety complete, the man had the most ascetic-looking features Willis had ever seen.

He spoke in a neat clear English:

"Who is the gentleman with the symbol of Quetzalcoatl?"

Willis silently showed the wooden disk again.

Garcia examined it front and back, then returned it, saying:

"Where did you get this?"

"Pepe gave it to me and told me to come here and show it to you."

"And *how* did it happen that Pepe gave it to you?"

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Willis found himself telling the adventures which had befallen Mike and himself at Larida. When he was done, Garcia clasped his hands behind him and, regarding Willis and Mike with eyes that were both shrewd and kindly, said:

"Where is Pepe now?"

Willis winced at the question. He had quite forgotten their friend. But unexpectedly Mike said:

"He is at the Hospital of St. Francis. Do not worry about him. He is under excellent care."

Garcia pursed his lips at the information. But that it satisfied him was apparent in his next words:

"Very well. Follow me, please."

HE TURNED and made his way to the rear, Willis and Mike close behind. Garcia turned right on passing through the curtains which masked the front from the rear and went up a short flight of stairs. They came to a narrow hall and moved on to a room at the far end.

Garcia unlocked the door with a key which he took from a ring attached to a band around his middle, like the girdle of a priest.

They made themselves comfortable on the sofa which was the main article of furniture in the room.

"You're are fortunate, indeed," Garcia announced. "I am expecting the arrival of someone who will be glad to see you. He will be here soon. Make yourselves at ease until he comes. If there is anything you may desire, ring this bell." He pointed out a bell cord to them. Then he left.

Willis and Mike had not talked much during their cab ride to Garcia's studio. Now Willis turned to the Irishman and said:

"All right now, give. How did you get out of that mess with a whole skin? And what made you go to Corta's?"

"That's funny," Mike replied, his unhandsome face wrinkling in laugh lines. "But I was just thinking the same thing, only about you. I simply let myself run with the crowd till we got to a street that crossed our path. Then I ran down that one. After all, I know the city pretty well and knew if I could get out of the mob, I'd be okay. And that's the way it worked out. About Corta, he's my boss here in Mexico. It was only logical that I go to him."

"Yeah," Willis said. "You make it sound so simple. But as for me, I'm still in dreamland about all this. Corta talks about his brother and says he's no good but how did the guy get that way. And I don't understand why he doesn't have him pinched? And don't give me the usual double talk."

"It's pretty hard to understand, I'll admit," Mike replied to Willis' query. He was no longer smiling. "You see, Emilio Corta is the black sheep of the family. But with Latin Americans, things are done differently. Particularly, when they are of the nobility. And the Cortas are. I don't know the whole history, but from what I've picked up, Emilio has shown criminal tendencies from childhood. Hernando, because he was the first born by a matter of a minute or so, is the head of the family. And as such, it was his duty to protect his twin.

"Their careers were arranged before their birth. Hernando was to be a career diplomat. Emilio was to take over the management of his father's estates. Then came the war. And Hernando made a gift of all his holdings to his twin. That is when I first became acquainted with the two men.

"The world's two largest producers of mercury are Spain and Mexico. During the conflict, Spain was neutral but with fascist leaders. Most of her mercury

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was finding its way into German hands. So we turned to Mexico.

"The Mexican government co-operated whole-heartedly with our program. Then came a complication. Somehow—and to this day it is still a mystery—a great deal of the mercury was being diverted to German channels.

"Then I met Hernando Corta. He owned the largest mines in the country. But he told me that he had turned them over to his brother. Well, between Mexico's agents and ours, we were able to break up the vast smuggling ring. And—though it was never publicized—we were able to establish that Emilio was the one responsible for the leakage. Then it was that Hernando pushed through his famous bill socializing certain industries which were of primary importance to the country. In other words, he saw to it that control of those mines were taken from the hands of his brother and given to the government.

"Emilio, twisted by nature and given to definite criminal tendencies, vowed undying hatred and revenge. As I said before, he and his brother are direct descendents of Cortez. Being an opportunist, he saw and took advantage of this volcanic disturbance which is tearing at Mexico's vitals. Only it is my opinion that his is a personal interest. He wants to seize control for what it can bring him."

WILLIS, who had been listening intently, said: "It's a hell of a story, Mike!"

"Listen, you," Mike began hotly. "If you think I'm ly——"

The door swung wide cutting off Mike's hot retort. Both men turned to see who had come in.

Three men walked into the room. First came Garcia, then someone who looked strangely familiar; and last, Pepe, his head bandaged, but the wide familiar grin on his face.

"Are these the men?" Garcia asked.

"Esure," Pepe replied. "I give it to him," and he pointed to Willis.

The stranger walked up to Willis and peered deeply into his face. Never before had Willis encountered such eyes. They burned with the strangest fanatical fire. They weren't young eyes. Indeed, they gave Willis the peculiar impression that within their depths could be seen something that was as old as time. It was disturbing, the effect they had on him.

"Tlixo!" the stranger intoned. "It is he. The journey must now be concluded."

He turned to Garcia and said:

"Has everything been prepared for the release of Ixanthlue?"

Garcia nodded gravely.

"Aye, mighty Toclezuma, all is in readiness. Our men are watching the house of the enemy. She is still within its confines."

It was then, that Willis recognized the man. No wonder he had thought him familiar! It was the Aztec high priest. Toclezuma. Only now, he was wearing modern clothing. Willis had to admit the man was impressive in any kind of clothes. He turned to Mike and said:

"Well it looks like things are coming to a showdown. This guy still thinks I'm Tlixo."

Mike was looking at him wide-eyed.

"It's true," he breathed.

"What's true," Willis asked.

"That you understand Aztec."

It was Willis' turn to look startled.

"Is that what he was talking in?"

"Sure. I couldn't understand him. It wasn't Spanish."

Garcia and Pepe were regarding them curiously, as they argued back and forth.

"But of course," Garcia broke in.

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"Why shouldn't he understand Aztec? He is Tlixo, a chieftan."

"The hell . . ." Willis paused in his denial. Let it be as they said. It made for an easier path to his goal.

"Then what are we waiting for?" he asked. "Let's get going."

IT WAS the sign they had been waiting for. With an alacrity that was astounding in people who were supposed to be slow in action, they started down the stairs. And Willis saw Toclezuma was as quick in his movements as was Pepe.

Waiting for them at the curb, was a car similiar to the one they had taken their memorable ride in. And at the wheel was the perfumed, dandified clerk who had greeted them on their entrance.

It was already dark. Willis gathered that they had been waiting only for night to come before they started out. Toclezuma sat between Mike and Willis; Pepe and Garcia were in the front seat, beside the driver.

The clerk drove with an observance of traffic rules that was trying on the nerves. Now that action was impending, Willis felt that familiar thrill again. As they were leaving the house, Garcia had handed Mike and Willis each a pistol, with the injunction to "use when necessary."

They pulled up before a garage and waited while Pepe walked in. He returned in a few minutes and, as they pulled away, Willis, looking idly through the rear window, was surprised to see three cars shoot out of the garage and fall into line behind them.

Now their own driver speeded up. Willis noticed they were entering into the poorer section of the city. The homes, here, were made for the most part of adobe. They were each a single story and, usually people were sitting or lounging at the doors. Then they pulled up before a cantina and Pepe got out again.

He disappeared into the cantina and in a few moments came out again. He put his head through the open window and said something to Garcia.

"They are ready," Garcia announced, and stepped out.

The rest followed. Then from the cantina, a half-dozen men walked out to form a group about Garcia and the rest. As though it were at a signal, the three cars which had been follownig them, pulled up and men leaped out and joined those around the figure of the photographer.

"Follow us," Garcia said in English to Mike and Willis.

IT WAS just an ordinary one-storied adobe house, no different from the dozen others on the street. But on second glance, Willis saw there was a difference; one that made it distinctive. Electricity was the source of illumination. All the rest of the houses were lighted by the usual candles, or kerosene lamps.

Some of the men had been ordered by Garcia to patrol the other side of the street, although, as far as Willis could see, there was no evidence that the occupants of the house were aware of the unusual activity outside.

Pepe, more sober in appearance than at any other time since Willis had first seen him, suddenly slipped around the side of a house only a few yards before the one that was their goal. Willis and Mike followed close behind. They clumped across a weed-filled patch, then still following the carefully moving Pepe, stole along an embankment until they reached a point directly behind their goal.

There they lay flattened in the grass, with only their heads showing. Willis saw the figures of several men in what

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appeared to be the kitchen of the house. He could dimly see the outlines of a range and sink. Suddenly the light within was extinguished. Pepe murmured, "Good!" and, rising to his feet, ran to the steps which led up to the short porch at the rear of the kitchen, and crouched down once more.

He waited there for a short time and Willis could feel and hear the pounding of his own heart. His throat was suddenly dry and his mouth had the feeling that it was full of cotton. Then Pepe arose again and, with infinite caution, stole up the stairs and tried the door.

It opened readily to his touch. Silently they stole into the darkened room.

A chink of light was to be seen under a door at the far end of the room. From beyond that door the indistinct murmur of voices. Again Pepe took the lead. They huddled close to the door and pressed their ears to the crack. Now the voices were louder, but Willis was unable to make out what was being said, for the men were not speaking in English.

A mouth pressed close to his ear and Willis heard Pepe whisper:

"They drunk! Is good! When time come, they run like rabbit." Suddenly there was a loud sound of someone pounding at the front door. There was the noise of something overturning. Then Pepe had the door open and the three, pistols out, were charging into the room.

It was a square, box-like chamber in the center of which stood a table. Several bottles were on the table. There was no other furniture.

Two doors opened into the room. One, straight ahead, gave onto a hallway which led to the front door. The other also led to a hallway, at the end of which was a flight of stairs. The front door was open and through it swarmed a group of armed men.

Willis, poised and ready for instant action, was brought to a horrified halt by the sound of a scream coming from some room above. Instinct told him the voice belonged to Jane Smith. He remained in a sort of petrified trance for the barest instant. Then, voicing a muted cry of rage, he bounded for the stair beyond the side door.

ONE of the men they had surprised made a belated effort to stop him. Willis slashed down with the barrel of the pistol, catching the man across the face with the gun-sight, tearing a wide streak across the skin of the forehead and sending him reeling back. Then he was on the upper floor.

The girl was still shrieking in an agony of either pain or fear. There were two doors leading off the narrow hall of the upper story. It took Willis only a second to identify the one from behind which an indistinct sobbing now came. His shoulder burst the door from its hinges and he was in the room.

Stretched out on a bed was Jane, her clothing half torn from her. She was tied to the bed posts, hand and foot. A narrow thread of blood ran down the lovely face, half turned to the sheet. Beside her, a red-hot poker in his hand, was a squat, thick-shouldered man, whose eyes, when they turned in Willis' direction, were the maddest he had ever seen. Facing Willis, was Blackie and another.

Then the gun in Willis' hand exploded into flame and avenging fury, and the beast by the bed sank to his knees, blood pouring in a great flood from his mouth. At the same instant Blackie and the other went into action. Blackie's hand made a lightning-like move up to his shoulder and came out with an automatic, which began to spit lead in Willis' direction.

There was something of sheer drama

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in the way Willis raised his pistol in the other's direction: it was so slow and careful. He was going to make sure that there would be no mistake when he fired.

Once again, the gun spoke and this time, Blackie's companion sank likeless to the floor. Whether Blackie was unnerved at the foolhardy way Willis was acting, or whether he lost his courage, Willis didn't know. But, snapping a shot at Willis, a shot that went wild, Blackie dove head-first through the open window.

Willis leaped to the opening in time to see Blackie slide down the rain spout into the darkness of the shrubbery. He fired twice more at the indistinct figure streaking across the grass. Then Blackie passed from view.

Willis ran to the bed. Jane did not move and he saw that she had lapsed into unconsciousness. The blood streaming from a cut on her cheek had almost dried. So pale was her face that at first he thought she was dead. Then he saw the faint flutter of her half exposed breast. Tenderly, with fingers that shook slightly, he covered the bared skin there and undid the knots of the ropes holding her to the bed.

Abruptly the room was full of men. Garcia, his face pale in concern, looked closely at the girl. Slowly she opened her eyes and, upon seeing Willis, the most wonderful light came into them. It was as if she had been waiting for him; for, with an inarticulate cry of happiness, she lifted her arms to him and he knelt at her side and held her close in an embrace which he knew was never to end, no matter what happened.

Willis felt, rather than saw, the figure of Toclezuma beside him. A lean brown hand reached out and separated the two. His voice, sonorous and full, said:

"The time has not come for your love. Our people await our coming and the centuries have finished with empty marching. Let us to the task which awaits."

Willis turned his head and regarded the tall figure of the high priest with musing, speculative eyes. He was tempted to say, "To hell with all this! I've got what I've come for. That's all I want."

Then the matter was taken from his hands by the girl's next act. She arose, unsteadily, and taking Willis by the arm, said:

"Come. Before the others return."

He had forgotten, for the moment, that Blackie was on the loose and would undoubtedly go to Corta to tell what happened.

THIS time Willis sat in the rear seat, with only the girl as a companion. He was content. As far as he was concerned the ride could go on forever. She still held tightly to his hand.

"When—when—" he hesitated over the words, as if afraid to say them—"did you—I mean——"

"When did I discover I loved you?" she asked gently. She laughed, a tinkling sound which sent his senses aflame. "At the strangest time. When you were lying unconscious on the floor of the little cafe in Galveston. You were lying there, silent and pale, then you murmured, 'Jane, Jane. So sweet. I don't believe . . .'

"They wanted to throw you into the gulf. Then the oddest feeling came over me. It was as if a voice had said, 'No! He is one of us.' I prevailed upon them to get you on board Torres' boat, with the instruction to let you off at Vera Cruz."

"Then you are the one responsible for my being on that ship?"

She nodded.

"But how," he asked, "did you get

(Continued on page 142)

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A GRAVE FOR

By B. E. LISTON

"Hurry!" cried the ghost, dragging Gullible along. "That's the last car!"

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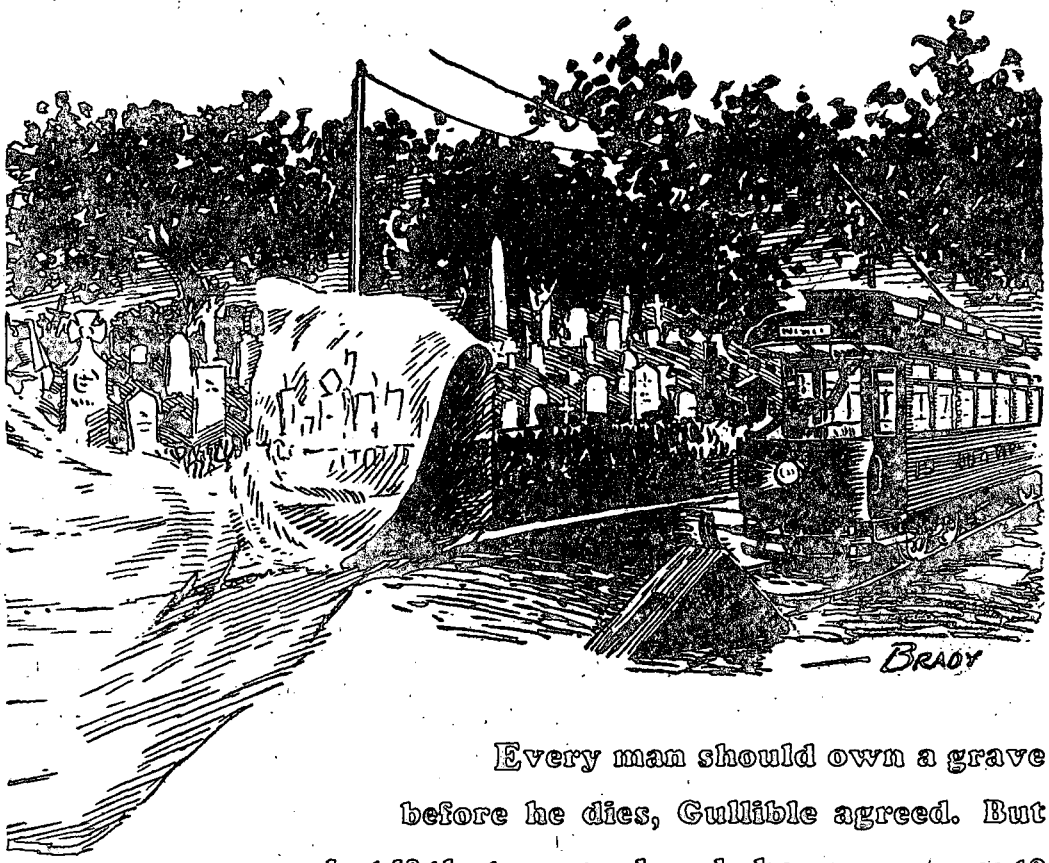
GULLIBLE . . .



Every man should own a grave before he dies, Gullible agreed. But what if that grave already has an occupant?

GULLIBLE TRABBELS paused for a moment in the doorway of the Chicago Coffee Shop. Then the doors swung back and caught Gullible in the small of his back.

Willing hands helped him to his feet and brushed the sawdust from his clothes. To these helpful souls, Gullible presented a joyous grin, brimming over with good cheer. The grin went a little flat when he saw Charley, the owner of the Coffee Shop, bending one of his sourest looks in his direction.

"Well, Sharley my boy," Gullible said as he staggered to the steam table, behind which Charley presided over the roast beef and hamburgers, "jush come in to pay my regards."

"That all you've come to pay?" Charley pointedly asked.

"Sharley!" Gullible's voice expressed pain and sorrow.

"Never mind that," Charley yelled suddenly. "You—you scavenging scoundrel. You owe me ten dollars!"

Gullible drew back in alarm, as though he expected to see Charley come over the steam table after him. Then, realizing Charley had no such intention, Gullible grew brave again. Drawing

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himself up to his full height, which was a feat in itself (he was a good six inches over six feet), he said:

"What do you mean, my good man?" A gentle hiccup, followed the last word.

Charley Borsh's face went brick red. The gray eyes behind the steel-rimmed glasses narrowed in anger. There was a sharp click, and the pipe which had been clenched in his teeth, fell to the floor. He had bitten clean through the shaft.

"So! I suppose you're insulted now, huh?"

Gullible detected an undertone of sarcasm in Charley's voice.

"You—insulted!" Charley continued. "When you came in the other night and told Harry, my bartender, that you were buying every one in the place a drink, I suppose you thought you were doing me a favor."

"Sure I wash," Gullible said indignantly. "How many guysh come in here and buy everyone a drink?"

"Aarh!" Charley said disgustedly, "you're drunk! As usual!" Then, realizing that Gullible must have had the money to get drunk on, Charley continued. "You *buy* your drinks elsewhere; but here you come to mooch! Well, that's all, brother! I'm going to throw your tail outa here right now."

Again Gullible drew himself up. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a thin sheaf of greenbacks. He thrust the money out over the steam table and said in a belligerent voice:

"Look, Sharley, fresh l e t t u s h ; money. Huh! Whash ten dollarsh ta me? Nutten! I got a hunnert an' ninety bucks here."

A HUSH came over the tavern at Gullible's sudden announcement. Gullible Trabbles had been a broken fixture at the Coffee Shop for a very long time. The lank drunkard, with his mournful eyes and unhappy faculty for believing whatever anyone told him, was a likeable person. But he had one bad habit. He loved to spend money he *didn't* have. And he never seemed to have any. So this sudden acquisition of wealth lifted many a head away from a beer stein.

Cokie Joey, the "sniff shnook," came over. His watery blue eyes looked up into Gullible's.

"You—got a hunnert an' ninety bucks?"

"Yep."

"How'd ya get it?"

"Horshes, my frien'; horshes," Gullible said grandiloquently. "A lil parlay paid the limit for me."

"Now isn't that nice." Charley was all smiles now. "So I'm going to collect the ten bucks you forgot to pay Harry for the drinks you bought the other night."

"Shure, pal," Gullible said peeling off a ten from the roll he was waving. "Here you are. And here'sh another shawbuck. Buy yourself a drink too."

After which he turned and carefully staggered over to one of the small tables along the wall. In sitting down, he bumped into the man who was sitting at the adjoining seat.

"Shcuse me," he said in apology.

"Quite all right," the man said.

Gullible's protuberant eyes regarded the man owlishly for a second. He took in the dark clothes, the tight sallow skin of his face, the dark eyes which stared unblinkingly into his own, and the eyebrows which formed a V over his nose. Gullible had an idea the V stood for villainy.

The man was talking again.

"So you've won a large sum of money."

"Yeah," Gullible replied. He was a little less drunk now.

"And have you thought of how you're

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going to spend it?" the stranger asked.

"Sure," Gullible answered, "I'm going to buy everyone in the house a drink. And when they're through with that drink, I'm goin' to buy 'em another."

"Very nice of you, my friend," the stranger said. "But really, I can't see any future in it. Now I——" He paused, shrugged his shoulders and lapsed into silence.

"Well," Gullible prompted, "You——"

"No," the other said, as though it was a waste of time. "I don't think you're interested in the future. You think only of the present." He heaved a sigh. "Ah, soon your money will be in the past. And then what of your fuure?"

"Say," Gullible demanded, "who are you? Father Time? What's all this about my future?"

"That's the way I like to hear a man talk," the stranger replied. And I, my friend, am just the person who can help you." He suddenly turned his face and looked deep into Gullible's eyes. His own dark burning eyes seemed to have a strange power. What they did, Gullible couldn't quite understand, but suddenly he was very drunk again. A voice was saying:

"There you are, my friend, all signed and properly yours for the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars. A deed to the Future. Oh, I say! That's good, you know. *A deed to the Future!* Well, my friend, I hope you'll like it. But then, what difference will it make?"

GULLIBLE lifted his head from the table. Was someone talking to him? He looked at his right hand. There was a paper clenched in the fist.

He peered blearily at the fine engraving of the paper. The print, however, kept blurring as he tried to read it. Giving up in disgust, he staggered over to Charley and, thrusting it down at him, said:

"Shay! Read it for me, will ya, Sharley."

Charley snatched it from Gullible's fingers and, after adjusting his glasses, read aloud:

"The Heavenly Rest Cemetery Association hereby grants to Gullible Trabbles the full use and privileges of Plot Number A-200, for the duration of his tenure."

Charley paused in his reading and looked at Gullible. A broad smile lighted his face as he continued to read:

"May he Rest in Peace. Paid, one hundred and fifty dollars. Then there's your name again and below that there's the name of the Heavenly Rest Association."

As Charley read aloud, an audience had gathered. When he finished, someone said, amidst the laughter which had greeted Charley's reading:

"Well, what d'ya know. Gullible got sucked in again. And f'r what? A grave! Say, Charley, how big is this grave?"

Charley looked down at the deed again. And burst into laughter.

"Oh, my," he gasped at last, "listen. 'Six feet by two feet by six feet.'"

There was a second's silence, then a huge roar of laughter went up. The grave was wide enough and deep enough but it was about six inches too short.

Gullible gravely retrieved the deed from Charley and said:

"There's nothing funny in that. What the hell! We all gotta die someday. And it's nice knowing where they're goin' to put ya."

He spoiled it all, however, by adding:

"And believe me, if I catch up with the guy what sold me this hole in the

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ground, it's going to be filled fast. And not by me, either."

He turned to glare at his heckling audience. And thought of something.

"Say, Charley, where'd the guy go?"

"What guy?"

"The guy what sold me this grave."

"I dunno. He left right after you fell asleep."

"Well, when was that?"

"Oh, a couple hours ago."

Gullible stared at Charley for a second in surprise.

"That's funny," he thought. "I don't remember falling asleep. Lessee now. I was looking at this guy, then—— That's all I remember. . . . I got it!"

He had shouted the last three words aloud They fell back in alarm as he cried:

"That's what he was—a hypnotist. And that's his racket. Puts ya to sleep, then sells those graveyard deeds. Well I'm going out to this cemetery and really raise a stink."

And turning, he elbowed his way past the crowd and through the door. The shock of finding out he had bought a *grave* had completely sobered him up.

THE Heavenly Rest Cemetery was located in the outskirts of the city. It was just turning dark when Gullible got off the street car where the tracks ended at the gates of the cemetery. A little stone house confronted Gullible. The legend on its window read, Heavenly Rest Cemetery Association. Gullible knocked at the door. It opened and a little man in faded jeans came out.

"Well," he shouted up at Gullible, "ye knocked, didn't ye. Don't stand there like ye was in a trance. What d'ye want at this hour. We're closin' anyhow, so go away."

Gullible retreated a few steps in alarm.

"Gosh, mister," he said apologetically, "I just wanted to know if——"

"Too late," the little man interrupted. "Everyone's gone home. Except the dead. And there's not much satisfaction in talkin' to them." And before Gullible could recover from this last statement, the little caretaker had stepped back in and slammed the door.

That was too much for Gullible. He marched up to the door and began to pound on it with his fist. After a few seconds it opened and the little man came out again. Before he could open his mouth, Gullible pulled out the deed and thrust it under the other's nose.

"Here, read that," Gullible snarled. "It says here I own a grave in this place. See!"

"Okay, okay," the little man said, after reading the deed, "so you're gonna live here. Well, what d'ya want me to do? Lay down beside ye?"

"No," Gullible grumbled, "but I sure in hell would like to see what I bought."

"Well I'm not going ta carry ye there, stupid. It's A-200 and that's right down this path about two hundred yards. So long." And again the door slammed in Gullible's face.

The lanky lush walked down the path indicated. It ended in a sort of semi-secluded park. There were a dozen plots in the little park, each bearing a small white marker. There was just light enough to distinguish the numbers on the markers. Gullible's was the third plot.

"H'mm, not bad," he said to himself, as he gazed down at the green bit of ground. "Kind of peaceful out here, at that. It sorta makes me feel sleepy."

A sudden drowsiness had come over him. Stretching and mumbling, he laid himself down on the grave and fell

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asleep.

"OH! WOE is me! Woe is me! No home. No place to go. No nothing. And here I am out in the cold, with only a sheet to my name!"

Those words had awakened Gullible. Sitting up he looked around to see who was talking. And then wished he was asleep again. But *in* the grave this time!

A gray shape floated over him. He noticed the shape had the semblance of a body. A body covered with a sheet. Yet he could see right through it. If only he were able to take his eyes from it. The sheeted figure floated closer. He tried to move but it was as though he were rooted to the ground. Closer it came, and from between Gullible's quivering lips came a plea:

"Please go away. Honest Mister Ghost. I ain't done nothing. Please. Yeow!!"

The sheeted shape had placed a hand on his shoulder. He screamed loud enough to wake the dead. But only his companion answered:

"Come now. There's nothing to be afraid of. It's only me. And I'm harmless, I assure you."

Then the shape sat down on the grave and began to sob. Gullible was definitely puzzled. He felt sorry for the ghost. But he had no experience in comforting ghosts.

"Oh," the ghost sobbed, "I know. It's not your fault really. You didn't know. But that's been my luck. Whenever I find a comfortable place, someone always wants to move in. And I was getting to like it here."

"W-a-wait a minute," Gullible stuttered, "I'm not dead yet."

"You're not?" the ghostly figure asked wonderingly. "Then what are you doing here?"

So Gullible told how he bought the plot. He was amazed to hear the ghost break into another fit of sobbing when he finished his tale.

"What's wrong now?" Gullible asked.

"That man! How he hates me!"

"What man?"

"The one who sold you this plot. He knows I sleep here."

"Ya mean ta say that guy sold me this just to spite you?" Gullible asked in an incredulous voice.

"Precisely! If you will permit me to tell my story, perhaps you will understand."

"Go ahead. It doesn't look like I'm going anywhere."

"WELL, to begin," said the ghost, I was a very wealthy man. But not the sort you usually find. My interests lay in out-of-the-way things and places. I was of rather an adventurous nature."

He paused and sighed windily, as he thought of his youth. He continued after a moment:

"First it was the adventure of war. But all wars end. Then it was love. That too was temporary. Then I became inoculated with the travel germ. And so for many years I traveled. And many were the strange countries I saw, many the strange sights. One night in a little village in China—but forgive me, my friend, I ramble. Besides, that is another story. It was in Würstblatt, Thuringerburg, a province of Saxony, where the strangest adventure of my life befell me.

"I had put up for the night at a small inn. A warming fire blazed at an open fireplace. The night had been cold and I went up to warm myself in its heat. It was then I noticed the man seated in the chair beside the fire. He greeted me pleasantly and soon we were talking as though we had known each other all our lives. I must admit

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I have never known so interesting a personality before. He had been everywhere and seen everything. I suggested that he come up to my room. He did and we continued our talk over some fine old *Liebfraumilch*.

"How it came about I do not know. But suddenly we were talking of souls. I remember saying, 'A soul. If I have a soul, I would gladly give it up—aye, even to the Devil himself—in exchange for one thing.' He asked what that was and I told him."

Again the pause and the sighs.

"C'mon, c'mon," Gullible burst out impatiently, "what was it?"

"The Flower of Heaven!"

"Huh?"

"The Flower of Heaven. Haven't you ever heard of it?"

"Nope."

"Well, it grew on the Tree of Knowledge. Adam and Eve would never have been banished from the Garden if they had known of it. For they were only admonished not to eat of the *fruit* of the tree. Nothing was said about smelling the flowers."

"So what about it?"

"Just this," said the shark in the sheet, "the fragrance of the flower gave knowledge to the one sniffing of it. Knowledge of everything he wanted to know."

"All right, I get it," said Gullible. "Then what happened?"

"I sold my soul to the Devil. For it was he who was in the room with me."

Gullible wasn't religious in even the smallest sense of the word, but then this business of selling one's soul was a little too much. Incredulously he asked:

"And the Devil bought it?"

"Aye! Nor did I regret the selling. If only he would have kept his end of the bargain."

"Ya mean the Devil welshed on the deal?"

"It was a scurvy trick he played on me. I should have known better than to trust the Devil. He brought me a flower, all right. But *not* the Flower of Heaven. Oh, it was a splendid bargain for him. My soul for a few colored flower petals which soon shriveled and dried into dust."

And again the ghostly figure was shaken by a fit of bitter sobbing.

"YA KNOW," Gullible said after a moment's thought, "that's something like what happened to me. And the more I think about it, the madder I'm gettin'."

"And that isn't all," the ghost said, breaking in on Gullible. "Not content with having my soul, he has made my ghost life miserable these many centuries."

"How's that?" Gullible asked, forgetting his own troubles for a second.

"Well, no sooner do I find a nice comfortable grave than he finds a customer for it. Just as he found you."

"*Who* found me?" Gullible demanded.

"The Devil, of course."

"Ya mean that guy in Charley's was the Devil?"

"Perhaps not. But obviously one of his assistants."

Gullible was curious. "Which one?"

"How do I know?" the shape burst out in ghostly impatience, "They all look alike."

"Okay! Don't get excited. I was just asking."

"Why shouldn't I get excited? If you needed a soul to get to Heaven and the Devil had it, wouldn't you get excited?" the ghost asked bitterly.

"Ya know, bud, ya got somethin' there. And I'm goin' to see if I can't find that assistant, and see if he won't buy this deed back. Buy it, hell! I'll

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give it to him for nix."

"No," the ghost said sadly, "it won't work. The Devil must have his fun. He enjoys watchin me suffer this way."

"Well, why don't ya do something about it?"

"What can I do? He has my soul and he certainly won't give it up just for the asking."

"Say!" Gullible exclaimed suddenly. "That gives me an idea! Maybe I can talk him into exchanging my soul for yours. After all, he's had his fun outa yours. Mine would be something new."

"Oh, no!" the ghost broke in, "It's an exceedingly kind thought. But I can't permit it. You'll need your soul to get to Heaven."

"Nuts, friend," Gullible replied, "people like me don't get ta Heaven, see. So I ain't got nothin' ta lose."

"Very well, then. Let us see if we can find the one who sold you the deed," suggested the ghost.

So having decided, Gullible and the ghost marched off down the path that led to the outer gate. Then Gullible remembered something. He came to a quick stop and said:

"Say, wait a minute! "What're people goin' ta think when they see the two of us?"

"What do you mean?" asked the ghost.

"After all—" Gullible began, as he turned to talk to the ghost. He stopped talking when he discovered he was alone.

"Hey," he called into the darkness about him, "hey, ghost! Where are you?"

"Where do you think I am?" replied a voice at his side. "Right here beside you."

Gullible jumped a foot into the air at the unexpected sound. He looked around him wildly but could see no one.

"W—where did you s-s-say?" he quavered.

"Oops!" said the ghostly voice. "Sorry. Forgot myself. Ectoplasm, you know! Not constant. I'm right behind you."

He was, too, when Gullible looked. The lanky figure whistled in bewilderment.

"Do you have to do that?" he demanded. "It's enough ta scare a guy right outa his pants."

"I'll control myself better from now on," said the ghost in apology.

"Control yourself? Mean ta say you can do that anytime you want?"

"Certainly. Really, it's quite simple."

"It is, huh? Well, when we leave this cemetery," Gullible suggested, "just turn yourself out. I don't want anyone to see ya."

THE gates were locked when the two reached them and Gullible had to climb over. One of the iron spikes at the top hooked his trousers in a place Gullible couldn't afford to have torn. In attempting to extricate himself, he slipped. But his pants caught on the spike.

The ghost, already on the other side of the gate, impatiently asked:

"What is keepin you? This is no time to indulge in fancy acrobatics. I have only till midnight, you know."

Gullible's voice floated down from the top of the gate:

"Dammit! I'm stuck up here. This spike caught me in the seat of my pants."

"Well, hurry and loosen yourself," came the ghost's suggestion.

"I can't reach it," wailed Gullible.

"All right; be with you in a jiffy."

Gullible looked around and saw the ghost floating up to him. Then he felt

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fingers tugging at his trousers.

"Wait," he yelled in fright," you're tearing my pants!"

He yelled a little too late, though. For the ghost, exasperated at the time they were losing, had given a vicious yank at the offending cloth. Something had to give. Luckily the roadway was of dirt. As it was, it took Gullible several minutes to recover his breath.

"Did you have to pull so hard?" he groaned as he got to his feet. He felt a hand take hold of him and suddenly he was being pulled toward the street car line.

"Wait a minute," he gasped, "we'll get there. Don't rush me like this."

While he tried to hold together the torn part of the pans with one hand, he slapped at the tugging arm with the other, just as a street car pulled to a stop before them. He was still futilely slapping away, as they stepped on the car platform.

The conductor eyed Gullible curiously as he stepped aboard. Gullible mumbled:

"Mosquitoes! You know."

"Mosquitoes," the conductor replied, "at this time of the year?"

"Then maybe it was ants," Gullible snarled. "And never mind the quiz program. Just give me my change."

The conductor hastily made change from the quarter Gullible had given him, saying as he did so:

"Sure bud. Just take it easy, now." and as Gullible stepped into the car, "And don't let the butterflies get you."

But he wondered, as he rang up the fare, who had said, "I do hope you didn't pay for me."

THE car was crowded with factory workers but Gullible found a vacant seat. He gave a casual glance at his seat companion and decided he didn't like him. Not that the man had said or done anything to make Gullible dislike him. Perhaps it was his appearance, or perhaps it was his breath, which reeked of an unusual aroma. Whiskey, beer and wine. Gullible's nose wrinkled in disgust—disgust for himself in not bringing a bottle of yocky along.

Everything was going smoothly, until the ghost got tired of standing. So he sat down. On Gullible's lap.

"Hey," Gullible yapped loudly in indignation, as he felt the not inconsiderable weight descend upon him, "Can't you find a seat of your own?"

He had unconsciously spoken aloud. Several of the passengers turned to see what was going on. And Gullible realized how silly he sounded. Because, of course, *they* couldn't see the ghost. He tried to make himself less conspicuous by sliding down in his seat. Then wished he hadn't tried. For the ghost had said:

"For goodness sake! Can't you sit still?"

"I could," he gritted in reply, "if you'd——"

"Yah," a new strange voice broke in on Gullible's retort, "whyn'cha sit still?"

The voice belonged to Gullible's seat partner. His eyes regarded Gullible with the unwavering intent stare of a drunk. Gullible managed to squeeze his face past the unseen but apparently solid bulk of his ghostly friend. To those watching the scene, it appeared as though Gullible was suffering from a painfully stiff neck. Having maneuvered his head around at last, he grunted a sour:

"What's bothering you, brother? You didn't pay for the whole seat."

"No?"

"No!"

"Oh, a wise guy, huh?"

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"Yah," Gullible returned smartly, "a wise guy. So?"

The other sniffed a couple of times, then lapsed into silence. Gullible, having won the bloodless battle, also became silent. He only wished he could have picked a lighter ghost for a friend. The silence lasted until the car went around a bend. The ghost started to slide from Gullible's lap, and threw up an arm to save himself. It landed smack against the drunk's cheek.

THE drunk didn't bother asking questions. He only knew that Gullible had struck him. Blindly he lashed back . . . and landed on the ghost. Then the rest of the car were treated to an indescribable scene. They saw Gullible doing his best to get up out of his seat, while the guy alongside him seemed to be fighting with himself.

Every now and then one of the drunk's wild swings would connect with Gullible, who would yell:

"Oh! Hit me while I'm not looking, will ya! Well, wait'll I get up."

Then he would resume his squirming. The ghost too was having his troubles. Because of the narrow confines he couldn't swing properly and half of his blows would land on Gullible. Which would make Gullible redouble his effort to stand up and join in the battle. It certainly looked silly to see their heads rock, as though they had been struck. Yet, obviously, neither was striking the other. But there was one thing that puzzled everyone. There were only two men fighting. But there were *three* voices yelling. Gullible yelped:

"Damn it, move! "I'm getting clouted."

Then the ghost shouted:

"Take that, you lout, and that! Oops—sorry, my friend, didn't mean to hit you, but it's so close here."

Then the drunk yelled:

"Thas one f'r you! An' this is f'r your friend!"

Then Gullible moaned:

"F'r the love of Mike, move, will ya?"

And the ghost replied:

"Not till I've struck another blow in your defense."

And Gullible bellowed as the ectoplastic fist struck him again.

Finally the conductor, hearing the sounds of combat, came charging into the car.

"So it's my goofy friend, is it?" he cried as he laid hold of Gullible's jacket. "I thought I'd have trouble outa you."

He began to haul away in an attempt to dislodge Gullible from the seat. And while he pulled at the jacket, the drunk grabbed Gullible by his pants and pulled in the other direction, with disastrous results. There was a tearing sound and Gullible went sprawling out into the aisle. The drunk looked disgustedly at the remains of the trousers which he held in his hands.

"Hell," he said morosely, "Jus' when I'm havin' more fun, fight ends!" He turned his face to the window and went back to sleep.

In the meantime, Gullible was having new troubles. The conductor had pinned his arms to his sides and was pushing him at a fast trot to the platform.

"Hey," Gullible began in protest, as they reached the door to the platform, "take it——" There was a loud thump. Gullible had turned his head to protest and the back of his head had come into painful contact with the door jamb.

Whatever thoughts he may have had about remonstrating, dissolved in a dizzying whirl of colored lights and re-

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volving constellations, which were punctuated by shooting stars.

"And stay off the street cars," yelled the conductor as he booted Gullible from the step. But the ghost had the last say. For as the conductor turned around, he received a terrific kick in his pants from Gullible's invisible friend.

IT HAD been a fairly warm night for so late in the fall but now a chill damp wind had arisen. Gullible shivered, and when he looked down to where his pants should have been and saw only his shorts, a bitter sigh welled from his lips.

"I was so happy," he sighed aloud. "I had money, friends, a warm place to stay and a bottle of vintage yocky to keep me happy. Then I got stuck with a grave and a ghost; and such a ghost! Then I lose my pants and . . . Oh! No! My money! It was in my pants! Twenty bucks! Now what'll I do?"

"Be of good cheer, my friend," said the voice of his unseen friend. Gullible had forgotten about him in the discovery of his loss.

The ghost continued: "What is money? The root of all evil. Let me tell you what happened one night in London. I was staying at Lord——"

"Oh, shut up!" Gullible snarled. "You and your stories! Now how are we going to find that guy what sold me your grave?"

"Simple," replied the ghost. "Let us go where there is gaiety and laughter."

"Say, what are you talking about? There must be a hunnert joints like that in Chicago, It'd take us a lifetime ta take 'em all in; that is, if we had the dough. And we ain't. As a matter of fact we got—" he paused to dig some change from a pocket of his jacket—"thirty-five cents. Now I can tell ya *that* ain't gonna get us nowhere. An' even if it does, lemme ask ya: *How* we gonna find the guy what sold me that grave?"

"Now, really," the other said, "it isn't as difficult as all that. We don't have to find that one. Any of the Devil's assistants will do. They all have the same duties and authority. As for money, let us worry about that when the time comes."

"Yah," Gullible grumbled, as they walked down the darkened street, "let *us* worry about it. A fat lot of worrying *you're* gonna do. . . . Hey, he screamed, as he saw a cab pull around a street corner.

The driver hearing a voice, slammed on his brakes and waited for the fare to come up.

"Van Buren and Clark," directed Gullible, as he stepped in.

"Well," said the ghost, as they settled themselves, "this is more my style. Comfort has always been paramount in my life."

"Yeah! And I suppose you always pick a grave with a plush lining," said Gullible ironically.

The ghost chuckled at Gullible's remark. The sound would have made The Shadow shudder.

"That reminds me of a very humorous incident," he said. "It happened just a few years ago——"

As Gullible listened to the tale, he happened to look into the driver's mirror and caught a reflection thrown back. It was the driver's face. There was a worried, puzzled frown on it.

"Say," said the driver, turning his head to survey the cab interior, "wasn't you the only one to get in?"

"Sure," said Gullible raising his voice above the droning sound of the ghostly voice. "Who else do you think?"

"Well," replied the driver skeptical-

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ly, "I'd swear there was two of you guys there. But my eyes only see one. And that one needs a pair of pants to cover his ugly legs."

"—and so I said to the gangster, "You're telling me of the people you killed, reminds me of the time when I was——"

"Caught ya," yelled the driver triumphantly, as he twisted his head to look back again. "Caught ya this time! So there is two of ya in——" His voice trailed off to a bewildered squeak as he saw there was only Gullible there.

"Don't get excited, driver," Gullible said smoothly, "I'm just practicing up on my act. "That's why you hear two voices."

"Well," grumbled the driver, as he turned away, "I wish you'd of picked another cab to practice in.

GULLIBLE dug his elbow into the ghost's side and whispered:

"Not so loud! And ta hell with your story. Where am I gonna get me another pair of pants? And where are we gonna get enough dough to pay for this hack?"

"Don't worry," the ghost whispered back. Have him stop here and I'll answer both questions."

The door opened and Gullible felt a slight swish of sound go past him. Then there was silence.

"Say," said the cabbie after waiting for several minutes, what's going on here? "What's the idea of keeping the door open?" There was a decided note of suspicion in his voice.

"Oh," said Gullible, "why—uh—I just—uh—sort of waiting——" Again there was that swish of sound, the door slammed shut and a pair of men's trousers floated before the driver's horrified gaze and settled themselves over Gullible's lap.

"Drive on, now," commanded Gullible, as he began getting into the pants. "I'm ready now."

"And so am I, brother," breathed the driver as he scurried out from behind the wheel. "Ready for the nuthouse! You can go where you want, I'm gettin' off here."

"Nuts!" exclaimed Gullible, as he watched the driver disappear down the street. "What do we do now? I can't drive!"

"Ah!" said the ghost. "I can! One of my minor accomplishments, if I do say so."

There was a sound of gears meshing and they were off again.

"Where'd ya get the pants?" Gullible asked.

"Oh, I met up with a man," came the complacent reply, "who quite literally jumped from his trousers as I went through my metamorphosis."

"Man," Gullible whispered, awe strong in his voice, "I'll bet that's something to see."

"It is," the ghost assured him.

"SLINKY'S is a small tavern with a big reputation, located at the tail end of South State Street. It has the reputation of being the only joint in town where the strippers really strip and the clippers really clip. It features a perpetual dimout, ten hostesses and the ugliest bouncers to be found anywhere. Also the cheapest glass of beer in town and the highest priced whiskey.

It was to this place that Gullible directed the ghost to drive. He reasoned that if there was one place in Chicago where the road to hell became paved, that was it. And so it was the most likely place to find one of the Devil's assistants.

Gullible explained all this as they entered the joint.

One of the strippers was going

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through her act, to the accompaniment of a trumpet, a sax and a set of drums. The customers seemed to find fun in pounding the tables as she peeled off various articles of dress.

"Disgustng," remarked the ghost, as he followed Gullible to an empty seat at the bar.

"What'll it be, chum?" asked the bartender.

"Two boilermakers," answered Gullible, forgetting for a second that he was with a ghost.

"Two?"

"S u r e," replied Gullible, "I'm thirsty."

"Okay, chum, it's your thirst," replied the bartender, as he went to fill the order. He set the four glasses down and walked away to fill another order. Gullible laid one of the three dollars he had found in the pants, on the bar and poured the contents of the two glasses down his throat. Then he reached for the other two. And found they were empty!

"What the——"

"Well," said the ghost reproachfully, "I was thirsty too."

"Well, don't let 'em go to your head," cracked Gullible, as he ordered two more boilermakers. They downed those and another pair. Then Gullible said:

"What 'ya shay, pal? How's about casin' the joint f'r that character?"

"Shure," replied the ghost, "issa cinsh. Gotta be here shomewhere. But lesh have another a t h o s h drinksh."

"That's jush wha' we need," agreed Gullible; "another drink."

There was a look of awe on the bartender's face as he placed the four glasses in front of Gullible. The look of awe changed to horror, as he saw two glasses of whiskey being raised into the air. He saw one glass empty into Gullible's mouth; but the other—it just tilted and the contents vanished into . . . nothingness. The same thing happened to the beer.

"Chum," whispered the bartender, as he sidled away, "you'll just have to wait on yourself from now on. And I better stop sneaking drinks, before I begin to believe what I see."

GULLIBLE got off the stool and carefully made his way to one of the small tables set against the wall.

"All ri' now, my friend," said the ghost, "I'll have a look around and shee what I can shee." A gentle giggle accompanied the words.

Gullible wondered if he was looking at the stripper going through her repertoire of clothes. There was plenty to see there. But evidently not, for the ghost was back in a few seconds.

"I have found him!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

"Where ish he?"

"Over there," said the ghost.

"Be nishe if I could shee where you're pointin'," Gullible said reproachfully.

"Well, take my hand," said the ghost, "and I'll lead you to him."

Gullible stuck out a hand and was jerked to his feet.

"Shlow down," he gasped, as he was brought along at a trot down the aisle between the tables.

He was brought to an abrupt halt at one of the small tables. A man was sitting there, alone. If it wasn't the guy who had sold him the grave, then it was his twin.

"Sho!" declaimed Gullible dramatically, "I foun' ya!"

The man turned a saturnine face in Gullible's direction.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Ne'er min' that," Gullible shouted. "I want my hunnert an' fifty bucks!"

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"What are you talking about?" demanded the stranger.

For a moment Gullible felt doubt. Then the ghost whispered in his ear: "Don't let him play ignorant!"

So Gullible tried another tack. Seating himself in the chair beside the man, he said:

"Now look, mister, that wasn't a nice thing to do. But fergive and ferget. Thash's me. But I got a complaint."

"So," said the other, no longer pretending, "and what is your complaint?"

"Firs' le's have a drink," suggested Gullible.

"No, thank you," replied the other, "I don't drink."

"Thash the trouble," said Gullible wearily. "You guysh don' drink, don' have fun, don' do nothin'—except sell graves ta guys like me. Some life! Always talkin' about the future. But not havin' any fun in the present."

"Well now, we have our fun," the stranger grudgingly admitted.

"Okay then, lesh have a drink."

"Very well, I'll have one with you."

"Three boilermakersh," said Gullible to the waiter, when he came over.

The stranger watched Gullible down his drinks and followed suit. He didn't see the other drinks disappear. He smacked his lips approvingly.

"Not bad," he said, "not bad at all. Mild too. Wouldn't mind another. Have one with me, my friend."

Gullible acepted wholeheartedly. They drank the next two—and the half-dozen others which followed.

"Now," commanded the stranger, looking owlishly at Gullible, "wha'sh your complaint?"

"You shold me a grave an' there wash somebody in it already," said Gullible.

"Who?"

"My frien', here," Gullible pointed to where he thought the ghost was.

THE stranger's head wavered drunkenly around looking for Gullible's friend. Then he saw him and a broad smile split his mouth.

"Well, if it isn't the Baron! How are you Baron? Tell me my frien'," he asked Gullible, "did the Baron tell you hish favorite shtory about the Flower of Heaven?" Then he burst into a cackle of laughter.

"Shay," broke in the ghost's voice, "lesh talk about that later. Lesh have another drink, now."

Dark suspicion filtered into Gullible's mind.

"What d'ya mean, the Baron's favorite story?"

"Didn't he tell you who he wash?"

"No."

"Well, I shouldn't tell trade shecrets. But he's Baron Munchausen, my master's favorite shtory teller. An' to keep him in good humor, my master let's ush sell these graves to you humans. Then when you go to shee what you bought, you meet the Baron. The Baron tellsh you one of hish shtories, especially about the Flower of Heaven." He went off into another fit of laughter.

"Well," demanded Gullible, after the stranger had gotten over the fit.

"Well, the humans usually fall for it and then the Baron gets drunk and finds one of ush. Then we take him back to my master and he entertainsh him. You shee, *there is no whiskey in hell.* The stuff's only fit for humansh."

Gullible looked at the stranger for a second, then buried his face in his hands. When he looked up, he discovered he was alone.

"Oh, well," he sighed philosophically, as he started for the door, "I always was a sucker for a 'con' story. The trouble is, who'll believe me when I tell them about it,"—and he scratched at one of the horns on his forehead.

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THE TIGER HAS A SOUL!

By LESTER BARCLAY

The Jap ace went down in flames, and a Jap flag went up on the scoreboard.

Then the Jap ace returned to the skies!

"EXCUSE me, sister."

The girl at the reception desk lifted startled eyes to the strong, lean figure of a rugged-featured, brown-eyed man with crisp dark hair, and wearing a worn leather jacket, oil-stained breeches and scuffed boots.

"Yes?" she said, smiling appraisingly.

"Is Mr. Conrad in? He's expecting me. I'm Mace Morris."

"Oh yes, Mr. Morris. His office is right over——" But there was no need for further directions. Sam Conrad's bull-like bellow penetrated to the farthest corner of the general offices of the Conrad Construction Company.

Mace grinned and walked into the office where that bellowing voice originated.

The haunch, paunch and jowl known as Samuel Conrad, was planted in the largest desk chair Mace had ever seen. A thick black cigar was tightly clenched between his teeth and he was shouting into the mouthpiece of a telephone.

"Listen, you dumb, gandy-dancing monkey! I told you what to do! A bonus for every man-jack of the crew and a case of whiskey in every shack. Now get out there and hire those drivers!"

He slammed the instrument onto its cradle with a muttered imprecation regarding, "dumb, white-collared slobs!" and turned to the broadly smiling Mace.

"Well! What the hell do you want?" he grunted sourly.

"I'm Mace Morris," Mace said. He still smiled but his eyes were carefully appraising Conrad. What he saw satisfied him and he continued: "You sent for me."

"Damn right I did! Sit down. Have a cigar." Conrad spat the words out at Mace as though he had a grudge against him. But the small pale eyes behind their puffy fat lids had already sized up the tall flyer.

Mace took the indicated chair, pulled a cigarette from a battered pack and waited for Conrad to talk.

Conrad watched him light the cigarette, then pulled the cigar from his own mouth, looked at it for a second, and hurled it into a waste basket. He selected another cigar from a case in one of his desk drawers. From another drawer he pulled out several typewritten pages and tossed them to Mace, saying:

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The Jap plane was trailing black smoke—it tried to land

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"Your contract. Read it."

Mace read it through very carefully. There was a bewildered look on his face by the time he had finished.

"I don't get this, Mr. Conrad," he said. "This contract says I go in as a transportation superintendant."

"What's the matter? Not enough dough?" Conrad asked.

"Hell, yes. More than I've ever gotten before. But I'm a flyer, not a transportation man," Mace replied.

Conrad's voice lost it's rumble and was almost soft as he said:

"Listen Morris. I hire two things: brains and men. The brains sit out there in my office and the men go in the field. I want you in the field."

"But why me?" Mace persisted.

"Because you're the guy who built an airfield where everybody said it was impossible, and then flew planes in on it when they said it couldn't be done. And most important—to me anyway—men'll work themselves ragged for you."

Mace was curious. "How do you know all that?"

Conrad exploded. "Hell, man, d'you think I hire men blindly? Not for this job I don't! I looked up your record. That's why I sent for you."

Mace was satisfied.

"All right, Conrad," he said, I'm your man. What's it all about?"

"The Burma Road," Conrad said. "But that's only part of it. Trucking stuff into China is my big headache. It's going to be yours, because that's going to be your job—getting those trucks through from Lashio."

So that was the idea! Mace let out a silent whistle. He had read all about the Burma Road, the lifeline over which supplies flowed to China in her fight against Japan. Then Conrad was building part of it, and trucking stuff across it. Mace had heard of the dangers natural and Japanese, which were to be encountered. He wasn't worried about either. It was something he had never done before and he wondered whether he could handle it.

But Conrad seemed satisfied, for he was already pulling large scale maps of Burma from a drawer in his desk. Mace had to admire the tremendous drive of the man. No wonder General Chiang had chosen his company.

For an hour they went over the details of Mace's duties. The difficulties of his job were told in minute detail. Mace wore a wry grin when the conference was over. This was going to be the biggest thing in his life.

As Conrad put it:

"Two hundred trucks! Six hundred men! And a country that kills. Jungle, mountains, heat, cold; but that road has to go through. And that isn't all. Morris. You've got to get it through on *time!* Get it?"

"I got it Conrad. And they'll get it. When do I leave?"

MACE MORRIS watched Shorty Jarvis adjust the timer on the big six-wheel truck and wondered what Sam Conrad was doing back in Chicago. Probably raising hell with some poor subordinate.

His eyes caught his own reflection in the rear view mirror. The face he saw was not the same one he had taken into Sam Conrad's office seven months before. There were creases that long hours of labor and sleepless nights bring to cheeks. Fine lines of worry had made their appearance around his eyes and lips. But the set of his chin and mouth seemed to have increased in stubbornness and determination.

The Burma Road was through. Mace had fulfilled his share of the contract. Supplies were going through from Lashio to Kumming. That is, they had

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been . . . until three days before.

Mace had been sitting in his office in Lashio when the radio man came running up.

"Hey Mace," he yelled as he tore through the open doorway, "Connor's at Kumming, wants to know what happened to those two trucks you were sending up with medical supplies."

Mace looked up from the report he was reading.

"Huh?" he said, his mind still busy with the problems of a sixty-foot road washout a hundred miles from Rangoon.

"Those two 'med' trucks that Mitchel and Larsen took out. Connors wants to know what happened to them."

"What does he mean, what happened to them? They should be there."

"Well, they're not, boss."

"Hm. Anybody here we can send?"

"Nope, Mace. You sent everybody out on that washout."

Mace got up and stretched. Every muscle in his body ached. Sweat was clammy against the skin of his chest and back. He blinked tired eyes.

"All right, Sammy," he said, starting toward the door. "Radio Connors I'm coming out with Jarvis."

As he sat there in the cab of the truck, he wondered what could have happened to the two trucks and the crews. Jarvis was through with his adjusting. He came back and eased his huge body into the driver's seat.

"Well, boss," he grunted softly, "we're off again. The last lap. All turns and no 'super'."

Mace stuck his head out of the cab window. Up ahead he could see the first of the circular turns of the road. It became lost in the blue haze of the high mountains stretching to either side. He knew that at the end of that winding staircase was Kumming.

"Let's go, Shorty," he said.

The truck shook and groaned as it bounced along on the packed gravel of the roadway. A thick cloud of dust enveloped it and its passengers. Sweat made dirty gray streaks down Mace's and Jarvis' faces. There was still a twenty-four-hour ride to go through.

IT WAS almost dusk when they reached a little Chinese village. It had the misfortune of being built on a plateau; open to observation from above and unprotected from the Japanese bombers who came to deal death.

Mace had seen such villages before. Half a hundred straw-thatched huts, a dozen stone houses, a temple and a school. A peaceful people eking out a hard existence. Then the bombers had come to rain death and destruction upon them.

This village was like others they had seen after a bombardment. Rubble strewed the streets and fire had completed the destruction the bombs had caused. It was a village deserted of life, for all life had been destroyed in it.

They got out of the truck after parking beneath the wide branches of a large tree. Cautiously they made their way through the village street. An acrid odor assailed their nostrils, for not all the inhabitants had reached the streets. Some had been trapped in their burning hovels and it was their scorched flesh that was giving off the horrible odor.

Mace's eyes reflected the bitter anger he felt.

"Damn them!" he said. "These poor devils didn't have a chance. And then to machine-gun them. Ugh!"

Jarvis, who had gone on ahead, called excitedly to Mace:

"Hey, boss, look! Mitchel and Larsen were here! Here's their truck-marks."

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Mace knelt beside the burly driver and examined the broad tire markings in the road.

"Our tires, all right. Well, let's see if we can't catch up to them."

They didn't have far to go—just a mile out of the little village.

"God!" Jarvis whispered in horror, when they came to the wreckage of the trucks. "the dirty yella dogs used tracers on them!"

A single glance told Mace the whole story. The two trucks had arrived at the village when the bombers struck. The drivers had loaded the trucks with as many women and children as they could carry, and started off to the next large town, about fifty miles away. But they had been caught in the open by some of the fighter escort of the bombers.

The wrecked and burned trucks, and the bodies strewn about like rag dolls, told what had happened.

Both drivers and their two Chinese helpers were dead. Mace and Jarvis placed their bodies in their truck and started off on the last leg of their trip.

"POP" CONNORS, dispatcher for the Conrad Construction Co., at Kumming, heard the rumble of the approaching truck. With fingers that shook a little, he turned off the radio. Slowly he got up and went out to meet the truck.

There was something about the tall, loose-striding figure coming to meet him, that stilled the news Pop had to tell.

Mace stopped short before the little figure of the old man. The terrible anger of his heart was burning more brightly than ever. From lips that were a thin white line, Mace poured out his hatred:

"The rotten, murdering dogs! They got Mitch and Larsen. Got 'em cold, with thirty women and kids in their truck! I'm through Pop! Sam Conrad can take his job and shove it! I'm a flyer. Well, there's a gang out here that can give those Japs hell and I'm joining them right now. And you can wire that to Conrad."

A strange smile lighted the old man's face.

"Yes, Mace. I guess they can use you all right."

He had been digging into his shirt pocket while he was talking. At last he pulled out the blue slip he was looking for. It was a radiogram. Silently he handed the message to Mace.

Mace unfolded it and read:

"Forget about your contract. Get out there and give those Japs hell." The signature was that of Sam Conrad!

"Wha—what's this, Pop?" Mace asked, bewildered.

"Came this morning, Mace. Sam figures you'll do a better job, fightin' the Japs."

Mace stood there silently, his anger ebbing from him, and wondered what the radiogram was all about. Pop watched him for a few seconds then said softly:

"We declared war on Japan yesterday. So you're free to do what you want, Mace."

Mace's dark eyes looked down into the pale blue ones of Pop Connors. There was a question in their dark depths. Pop said:

"Yep, son, I know. Ever since Colonel Channon and those Flying Tigers came here you've been wantin' to get in with them. I'd say you're wastin' time talkin' to me."

Mace gave a hitch to his trousers as though he were a pitcher faced with a crisis. Then, smiling his thinks, he turned and walked away.

Pop felt a glow of pride, as he watched the tall, loose-knit figure stride

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off into the darkness. As he turned and walked back into the shack, he whispered softly to himself:

"Looks like Colonel Channon's going to get himself a new ace."

THE operations hut of the A.V.G. was a simple, frame shack. A small, narrow sign held the legend, "A.V.G. OPERATIONS. Captain Whitson, C.O.

Mace pushed the door open and strode in. There were only two men in the square interior. Several chairs were scattered about a plain wooden table near the center of the room. The men were standing over a map-strewn desk in a corner of the room. Mace knew both. The tall, spare, gray-haired man with the black-stained briar clenched in his teeth was Colonel Channon, leader of the A.V.G. The short, broad-shouldered one was "Scotty" Whitson, the C.O.

Colonel Channon looked up at the squeak of the opening door.

"Well, well; Mace Morris. How are you, son?" he said, thrusting out a hand in greeting to Mace.

Mace shook the Colonel's hand and said:

"Just fine, Colonel. And you?"

Colonel Channon merely smiled around the briar. It was Whitson who spotted the unusual tenseness in Mace.

"What's wrong, Morris?" he asked.

Mace's mouth lifted at one corner in a wry smile.

"Nothing anymore," he answered. "Not since yesterday anyway. You fellas need a broken-down transportation man?"

The two men of the A.V.G. looked at each other for a second Then Channon said:

"What happened, Morris?"

The tilted smile remained on Mace's mouth as he answered:

"Y'see I pulled in here three weeks ago and Pop Connor told me about Pearl Harbor. So I high-tailed it back to Lashio; cleaned up my affairs and rode down to Toungoo. They told me you'd come up here. So here I am. Without a job and aching to get a crack at the little yellow rats."

"Sounds good; and we do need men like you. But you've had no combat experience. You might be more of a handicap than a help, Morris."

Mace said: "Colonel, you know me. I've been flying planes for a long time. But if you can't use me for combat, why, hell, I'd make a good instructor or even a ground man, wouldn't I?"

Channon looked away from Mace to Whitson. Whitson nodded his head at the question in the Colonel's eyes. The Colonel looked at Mace again and said:

"All right, Morris. Report tomorrow, to Scotty here."

Without a further word, Channon turned to Whitson and the two began to study the maps again.

Mace turned and walked out.

THE dawn patrol was just leaving when Mace turned up the next morning. He exchanged greetings with the six men of the patrol and walked into the hut.

"Mornin', Scotty," he called to the C.O. seated at the desk. "Morris reporting for duty."

Scotty smiled a greeting and said:

"Well Mace, Colonel Channon and I are in agreement on one thing; that you are a hell of a good flyer. Also, that you'll do the kids in the outfit a lot of good. Sort of steady them. Some of them like to fly solo on combat; get out of formation, you know; play hero. But to get back to you. I'm going to take you in hand, starting right now and teach you the rest of the business."

Mace proved to be the most apt pupil

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Scotty ever had. He was easily the best flyer in the group and took his combat training like a duck takes to water. Within two weeks he was ready for active duty.

Scotty and Mace came into the operations hut one afternoon to find Channon, waiting for them. The familiar briar was still with him. Removing it from his lips, he said:

"This is it. We've been called on to protect Rangoon. Tomorrow morning, Scotty, you will take two squadrons out to Mingaladon Airdrome. You'll operate from there. Mace, you will lead the second squadron."

A meaning glance passed between Scotty and Mace. This was what they had been waiting for.

"Oh yes," Channon went on, "I am in complete charge of our operations. So your orders will come from me."

He shook hands with both men and they left.

"Looks like we've got a real job on our hands, Mace," Scotty said reflectively.

"Um hm."

"Oh well, they're not so hot."

Mace didn't bother replying to that. He knew better. He know, in fact, just how difficult their job was. The R.A.F. had only thirty-six antiquated Brewster-Buffalo pursuit ships at their airdrome, while the Japanese would be able to put a hundred planes into the air at one time.

"Yeah. Well, no use thinking about it now, Scotty," he said at last. "Let's tell the gang and get ready."

THE Rangoon Mace had first seen eight months before was gone. In the place of that orderly and civilized city was a seething caldron of hates, fears, disrupted commerce and a community of diverse people who were preparing for a day of doom.

The anticipated trouble wasn't long in coming. It happened on the third day of their arrival. Word came through that a large formation of fighter-escorted bombers were on their way to Rangoon.

Mace was with Scotty in the "ready" shack, when the news came. Scotty barked an order to "scramble" to the dozen pilots in the shack; then halted Mace as he was going through the door.

"Don't forget, Mace," he ordered. "Stay in the sun. And to hell with the fighters! Get those bombers!"

Mace nodded and ran out to where his plane was parked. Subconsciously he noticed the R.A.F. men running to their planes also.

"It oughta be a good show," was his thought as he taxied out for his takeoff. "The boys are just itching for a fight."

He made sure that he had plenty of altitude before leveling off for the interception. He looked around and grinned to himself when he saw the six ships of his squadron in a nice tight formation. To his right and slightly in advance, Scotty's echelon was flying in a compact group also. And behind them somewhere were the Britishers.

Then he had no more time for thought, for suddenly, five thousand feet below, he saw the sky armada of the Japs. Forty bombers and sixty fighters!

His lips began a soundless whistle as he set the nose of his ship down in a screaming power dive. He was on them ahead of the five other ships of his command.

As he plummeted past the leading bomber, he gave it a single burst from his gun. It seemed to disintegrate in mid-air. As he pulled out of his dive another bomber crossed his path. That was a mistake which he rectified immediately. A smoking plane, with the R.A.F. wing markings fell toward the

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earth. And machine gun bullets began to make a neat pattern along his right-wing edge. A Jap fighter was on his tail!

Quickly, he side-slipped and tried for altitude—and saw his instrument board splinter before his face. The Jap pilot had anticipated the maneuver. He knew he was in a spot! From the position of the bullet pattern, he realized the Jap was on his tail, a little above and to his left. So he did the one thing the Jap couldn't have figured on. He did a wing over to his left, directly into the other's path. As the Jap frantically zoomed past, Mace sent a hail of bullets into the unprotected belly of the fighter plane. A huge burst of flame enveloped the craft. There was only one guess in this game and the Jap had guessed wrong.

But Mace knew that he too was through for the day. His plane had been hit in too many places to continue fighting. So he set out for home. As he set his course, he looked about to see how the others were doing.

What he saw almost made him turn back. A lone Jap plane was being attacked by three planes: one American and two British.

Never before had Mace seen such manuevering. Deliberately he swung his plane around, so he could see the outcome of the battle. The way the Jap twisted and turned, seemed like sheer witch-craft. Yet Mace also saw that despite the odds against him, he was on attack and not defense.

In less then ten seconds the Jap had evened the odds. It was the American against the Jap now. The British planes had been put out of the battle. And Mace saw too that the American was no match for the Jap. The pilot of the A.V.G. plane must have realized it also, for abruptly he streaked down for the tree tops, the Jap on his tail. Then both planes were out of Mace's line of vision.

MACE was almost at Mingaladon before he knew what was bothering him. The Jap plane! It was a model he had never seen before, more streamlined, heavier armored ship than the others of the group. Also it's markings were different. Where the others had the usual Rising Sun insignia, this plane was unmarked except for a large black dragon painted on its fuselage.

The landing field seemed to rise to meet him. He clambered stiffly from the cock-pit as a broadly smiling ground crew man asked:

"How many, Captain?"

His answer was short. "Three!"

There were eight other A.V.G. planes there. That meant three were missing. Just as he reached the operations hut, he saw two of them come in.

Scotty looked up as Mace came in. The tall man answered the unspoken question in Scotty's eyes.

"Three—two bombers, one fighter."

Scotty's mouth split into a wide grin.

"Man! Did we do it! Twenty-eight so far for us."

The two pilots who had just landed came in to report. The other men who were there turned expectant faces to them. Silently each man held up two fingers!

"Wow!"

Al Gordon, the youngest of the group, yelled, "Thirty-two for us and none for them. Some score."

"Maybe."

They all turned to Mace, who had spoken. Mace continued:

"Did any of you see Tex Halsted?"

Scotty answered:

"Last I saw of Tex, he was hopping tree-tops trying to duck that Jap."

Tex never came back, although they waited until darkness came to kill all

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hope.

The report came in the next day from R.A.F. headquarters. They had shot down sixteen planes but had lost nine themselves. Mace was quick to notice the fact that the strange Jap plane had been given credit for four of them. With Tex it made five planes for that one pilot.

The next six days were spent in a sort of horror vacuum for the pilots of the group. The Japs came over three times a day. And each succeeding day made the task of keeping them away from Rangoon more difficult. Although it was true that the city had not suffered any real damage, still some bombers came through. Further-more, the Japanese ground advance through Burma was unchecked and the populace of the city was becoming more and more unmanageable.

AT MINGALADON Airdrome the men were becoming more and more like avenging angels. No matter what the Jap air force did to stop them from bringing the bombers down, the group's score sheet kept mounting to almost astronomical figures. Every man of the group had brought down at least three planes. Mace was the leading ace with fourteen.

But there was a fly in the ointment—the strangely marked Jap ship and its pilot. He was a thorn in their side—a deadly thorn. Mace had kept track of the Jap's score: nineteen Allied planes, most of them British.

This morning, the group had just come in from a dawn patrol, and most of the pilots were in the operations shack. Suddenly the peculiar high whine of a Jap plane was heard. Then he was over their heads—and gone.

As the plane streaked away a small bundle was seen to drop from it. Because it was too small to be a bomb, the pilots made no attempt to reach the safety of the slit trenches, but ran to see what was in the little package. It proved to be a note, placed in a bottle. The note read:

"Honorable Americans:

I have found that too many of your pilots are of inferior quality. Therefore I am assuming this challenge to your ace of aces, to mortal combat. I shall be over the Paan area tomorrow at dawn, alone. I shall be expecting my honorable opponent."

The note was signed, *Baron Hokadi.*

Scotty looked at Mace and said:

"Okay, big boy here's your chance. That Jap's been asking for it. And your our top man."

Mace didn't reply but the thoughtful expression on his face told how the challenge affected him. Not that he was afraid. But he knew only too well the advantage the Jap possessed in a plane that was speedier and more maneuverable than the American's. He also suspected what was behind the challenge: a desire to rid the Japanese of the thorn in their side. For Mace was to the Japs what the Baron was to the Allies.

There was no use in thinking too much of the morrow, however. Mace gave orders to the ground crew and the armorer to make his ship ready.

THE dawn broke as all Burma dawns break—in a sudden great golden glow. Light shimmered and reflected from the lush green jungle growth surrounding the airdrome.

Mace took in a great lungful of air as he made a last-minute check of his plane. Scotty had come down with Mace. The other pilots were waiting for their orders.

"Just one thing, Mace," Scotty said,

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his face more serious than Mace had ever seen before. "If the Jap's too good, don't take any chances. You're worth too much to this outfit, alive."

Mace smiled that wry smile as he heard Scotty out. But his eyes were warm with his feeling. He knew what Scotty meant.

"Don't worry, pal," he said, and began to clamber into the cockpit.

Scotty reached up, seized one of Mace's hands and wrung it hard, saying:

"Luck, pal."

Mace nodded and then gave the ship the gun. He circled the field once and then headed for his rendezvous with the Jap.

The Jap had picked an excellent spot for their sky duel. The area around Paan was a dense mass of jungle growth, with the Salween river winding its sinuous way through the underbrush.

Mace's lips formed into a pucker. As he looked below, he whistled his silent tune.

"Smart boy, that Jap," was his thought. "He is going to be sure only one of us goes back. It'd be suicide to try to land down there. Even a parachute landing in that jungle's no good."

He didn't have long to wait. He was flying at about twenty thousand feet, with his motor at three-quarter speed. The air was already shimmering in he morning heat haze. And then he saw the plane approaching. The Jap too was coming in at twenty thousand feet.

The two planes circled each other, like two great eagles about to do battle. And, like eagles at battle, the one who had the greater altitude struck first. That eagle was the Jap.

Mace had stopped his soundless whistling when the Baron stopped his circling and set his plane up another thousand feet. Then from his added height he came screaming down at Mace.

The American set the nose of his plane up to meet the Jap. Mace had, as usual, done the unusual. The usual thing in case an opponent had superior altitude, was to wait until the last moment, then side-slip. But Mace knew the Jap would be prepared for that, so he rose to meet the diving plane. For a second it looked as though the two ships would crash. Only at the very last instant did the Baron pull to one side.

Mace was ready for just that move. As the Baron pulled away, Mace caught him in his sights for a brief second. It was almost enough, for Mace saw his bullets enter the dragon's tail. Then the Jap was on him from behind. How he did it, Mace never knew. All he knew was that he'd better get the hell out of there because the Jap's guns were playing a devil's tattoo against his ship.

For the next five minutes, they chased each other all over the sky. It was an even battle all the way. But at last the Baron made the one mistake Mace was waiting for. Twice in those five minutes the Baron had gotten onto Mace's tail and twice Mace had shaken him off, both times by the same maneuver. Then the Baron did it again, but this time Mace pulled the unexpected. The Jap was expecting the same thing that happened before and Mace started to execute that move.

But he never completed it. Instead, he sent his plane into a stall and again the Baron's ship passed by. Only now in the position Mace was in he could send gunfire directly into the belly of the Jap plane.

The Baron's plane began a slow spin to the earth below. Black, oily smoke began to drift from it. Mace followed the plane down. He could see the des-

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perate attempts the Baron was making to pull out of the spin. But it was of no avail. The green forest rose to meet it. The last Mace saw of the plane, it was falling into an open place in the jungle. Mace didn't bother going any lower. It was impossible for anyone to get out of that alive.

WHEN Mace crawled from the plane at the airdrome, it seemed that every pilot in the A.V.G. was there to greet him. He looked over his Tomahawk before reporting to Scotty. He wondered how he had ever been able to fly the plane back and why some of the Jap's bullets had not struck a vital spot. He could hear the wondering remarks of some of the men clustered around the plane. They were agreed that they had never seen a plane so pock-marked with bullet holes.

Silently Mace made his way to headquarters, walked over to the bulletin board, and taking one of the small Jap flags from a rack, pasted it up under his name.

Scotty's face became lighted up with a broad smile, while the rest of the squadron broke into loud cheers. Baron Hokadi had gone to meet his ancestors. Mace had scored his fifteenth victory.

Scotty waited until the others had left before he asked the details of what took place. Mace told him. Scotty asked:

"Are you sure that Hokadi crashed?"

Mace said: "No, I didn't see him crash. But that opening in the jungle was about a hundred feet across. A river bisected its middle and, as I saw the plane spin in, a tiger came down to the river's edge. It just isn't humanly possible for him to have escaped."

Scotty congratulated him, then gave him the latest news.

"We've been ordered to Magwe. That is, you have; I remain here until further orders. So tomorrow, you and the A squadron take off."

LIFE at Magwe was different from that at Rangoon. The tension wasn't as high and the patrols less frequent. In fact, Mace became tired of the monotony of his existence. The squadron was there about two weeks when they were cheered by the arrival of two dozen P-40B's. They were a most welcome addition, as the Tomahawks were just about ready for the junk heap. And the newer, faster, better armed Kittyhawks were just the planes to combat the Jap Navy Zeros which was being used now.

It was then that Bob Phillips flew in with the rest of the squadron which had remained at Rangoon. He strode in to headquarters and over to Mace seated at his desk. Mace looked up at his entrance and saw the set expression of the flyer's face.

"What's wrong, Bob?" he asked. It took an effort for Phillips to control himself.

"He got Scotty, this morning," he said in a low voice, "Scotty didn't have a chance."

"Wait a minute, Bob," Mace commanded, "Who got Scotty? Where? How?"

"The Baron! Halfway from Prome to here." Phillips shouted, suddenly losing control, "Damn you, Morris; you lied! You never even met the Baron! I saw him shoot Scotty down."

Mace stood up so fast his chair fell backward to the floor with a crash.

"Phillips, you're crazy! The Baron is dead! Has been dead for two weeks."

"And I say you're a liar! I tell you, I saw him with my own eyes. And if that isn't enough for you, the rest of the squadron saw that black-dragoned plane too!"

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Phillips turned away from Mace after his denunciation and strode over to the bullentin board, reached up to the flags under Mace's name and savagely tore one off. Then, without a backward look, he left.

Mace knew without looking that it was the flag he had put up for the Baron's plane. So the Baron wasn't dead. But Scotty was—killed by that pilot whom Mace had reported shot down. A great anger began to burn in Mace's heart. An all-consuming, vengeful anger. And that anger was fed by the attitude of his men.

For Phillips, in his disgust and anger, had told the rest of the men what had happened. Mace had committed an unpardonable crime. He had lied about what had occured. Worse, he had probably never met the Baron. At least, that seemed to be the consensus of opinion. And they showed their feelings for Mace in a silent scorn, more effective than if it had been vocal.

Mace became like a madman in his complete forgetfulness of danger. Three times a day he went Jap hunting. Sometime alone and sometimes with others. He had special racks fitted to his plane so he could carry small bombs. He became the scrouge of the skies for the Japs. But in all his sorties he never ran across the Baron.

Yet the Baron lived; there was no doubt of that. Patrols had gone out and returned with planes missing and with tales of the Baron's prowess. All other Japs were reasonably easy prey. But Hokadi in his black dragon plane became something from which the A.V.G. pilots were prone to shy. All but Mace; and he, despite his desperate attempts to find the Baron, was frustrated in his desire.

A WEEK went by. In that week Mace had become a gaunt spectre of a man. He would leave at dawn, return only for a refuel; then he would go out again. When dusk would begin to settle on the field, the hum of his plane could be heard winging its way home.

The pilots became a little afraid of Mace. He spoke to no one, except to give orders. And at night they could hear him toss in his sleep, mumbling, something about a "devil in a dragon plane."

Then one day an order came through. "Concentration of enemy planes at Paan. Choose volunteers for bombing mission."

Mace looked at the order with feverish, burning eyes. A strange thought came to his mind. Paan. That was where their duel had taken place. And strangely enough it was in the Paan area that the pilots had reported seeing Hokadi. He decided to bomb the airdrome there—alone.

His plane carried racks for four fifty-pounders; enough to do considerable damage. And the chances were in his favor, for the Japs would never expect a lone plane to make a bombing raid.

He was right. The Japs were caught flatfooted. Twenty-five planes were lined up on the field ready for take-offs, when Mace, coming in low out of an early morning sun, set his bombs squarely among them. Then he reversed his run and sprayed the remaining planes with tracer bullets.

For the first time in more than a week, Mace felt and acted like his old self. His lips were puckered in that soundless whistle again as he set his course for home.

"Now if only the Baron would show up," he thought, "that would be the end of a perfect day."

It was as though the gods of battle had heard him. For suddenly his windshield splintered and a hundred

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whistling devils were about his head. Machine gun bullets! Instinctively he kicked right rudder, veered away from the hail of death, and looked out the side of his cockpit. An unholy look of joy came into his eyes. It was the Baron!

Even as he jockied for position, his mind was busy.

"This is it! And this time there'll be no escape; I'll make sure of that."

But it seemed as though the Hokadi he had fought before had learned a number of new tricks since his return. No matter what Mace did, the Jap seemed to anticipate his every move. Slowly but surely Hokadi was getting the upper hand.

Then Mace decided on a desperate and hopeless maneuver. Hokadi had gained a five-hundred-foot ceiling over Mace and was coming straight down in a dive impossible for the American to escape. So Mace did what he had done the first time they met: set his plane directly for the Baron.

"You devil," Mace whispered, I'm going to die. But you'll die with me, damn your soul."

He held his course absolutely level. Again, as before, Hokadi tried to sweep by at the last moment. But this was no Tomahawk he was meeting; this was a Kittyhawk—a plane with more speed. Hokadi misjudged that speed. There was a loud splintering crash as the nose of Mace's ship tore through the Jap's wing and had became locked there. The two ships began a grotesque, whirling fall to the earth, five thousand feet below. And as the planes fell, two figures became detached from them.

MIRACULOUSLY, neither of the men had been hurt by the collision. Mace, floating down to earth in his parachute, looked about for Hokadi and spotted him about a hundred yards away. Although he was unhurt by the crash, Mace felt numb all over. Slowly his hand traveled down to where his automatic lay strapped to his thigh. Carefully he pulled it free and sighted it at the floating figure of the Japanese flyer. The gun jumped and jerked in his hand. For a second he thought the sky sent back the echoes, then realized the Jap, too, had a gun and was returning Mace's fire. But the jerking chutes made accurate firing impossible. Once Mace felt a burning sensation in his side, and once a line snapped over his head. But that was all the damage done.

They were headed for a clearing about a hundred yards across. Hokadi landed first. As Mace slowly settled to the ground, he saw the Jap loosen his harness and aim the gun at him. But something must have been wrong, for, after a second, he looked at the gun and hurled it away from him. Then he made off through the jungle just as Mace landed.

It took only a few seconds to loosen the harness and Mace was after the fleeing Jap. He could hear him crashing through the underbrush ahead. Then the sounds stopped, and Mace paused in his headlong rush. Carefully he made his way in the direction the Jap had taken.

Vines and creepers tore at his face and hands. He had just crawled over the trunk of a fallen tree when he felt a body strike his and a red-hot poker was plunged into his side.

Savagely Mace twisted aside. So savagely in fact, that the bloody knife Hokadi held was torn from his grasp. Now they came at each other with bare hands. Again Hokadi held the advantage, for the Jap had struck Mace with a lucky shot and the knife too had

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made a deep but not serious wound.

Mace however had something the Jap didn't have: the terrible lust for revenge. It evened the scales. Mace rained hammer blows at the Baron. In return, the Jap fought with all the fury of the damned. But at last Mace got him close in and his hands fastened themselves about the Jap's throat. At the same time the Jap caught Mace's throat in his hands. It was a duel then as to who had the stronger grip.

Mace's fingers strained with all their strength to crush the life from Hokadi's throat before the Jap could strangle him, for he felt life's blood ebbing fast.

A black curtain was beginning to form before his eyes; his breath came in labored gasps through parted lips. Slowly the curtain descended across his consciousness; but with his last remaining strength he squeezed at the swollen throat of the Jap. Then he fainted.

SLOWLY Mace opened his eyes and painfully crawled to his feet. How long he had lain there unconsicous, he could not know. He knew only that his throat felt like it had been in a vise for a long time. His tongue seemed swollen to twice its normal size and the wound which the knife had made burned and throbbed horribly.

He looked about for Hokadi but the Jap had disappeared. Mace felt a great weariness descend upon him. So the Jap had escaped again. Slowly and painfully he started off in the direction of the river he had noticed as he floated down. He went only a few steps before he stumbled over the body of a tiger!

He stood, swaying tiredly, and looked down at the tiger. His eyes saw the huge dead body but his brain, numb from shock and weariness, refused to admit the strangeness of the body lying there. Then, like a flash from the blue, the thought came:

"How did the tiger get here and who killed it?"

As though that thought was what he needed to break through the barrier the numbness had erected around his brain, he began to think and see clearly.

Forgetting the sickening pain of his wounds, he knelt in the jungle grass. When he stood erect again, after an examination of the dead tiger, there was a look of startled wonder in his eyes.

"My God," he whispered aloud, "that Jap is a superman! To have recovered from my attempt to choke him, then fight this tiger with his bare hands and kill it—by strangling it to death. But where the hell is Hokadi now?"

There was no time for speculation, however. He was in enemy territory. His one hope of reaching safety was by means of the river. He knew it wasn't far off. Nor was it. For, after some ten minutes of strenuous jungle crawling, he reached its banks.

There was something strange about the area. Something which struck a familiar chord in his mind.

"Of course!" he exclaimed aloud. "This is where Hokadi crashed the first time."

He had recognized a banyan tree on the other shore of the river. It was the only one he could see and it served as a natural landmark.

He walked up the river shore for a few hundred feet, looking curiously about him. He could see where a plane had landed; the wheel marks still showed.

"But how did the Baron escape that first time?" he asked himself.

A moment later he found the answer to that question. When he saw what had been done, he shook his head in disbelief.

"This is impossible! Even if the

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Jap was able to crawl from the plane, the tiger was waiting for him. And even if the tiger *had* been frightened away, for Hokadi to clear out the brush and make a runway for a plane would take the strength of—of a tiger! Yet he must have done it, for there isn't a village within twenty miles of this spot."

Responsible for this trend of thought, was the sight of a plane runway literally hacked out of the jungle growth. He could even see where the plane had been pushed around and set upon it. And, as the final, convincing bit of proof, there was no plane there now.

Mace was so wrapped in his thoughts he almost walked past the body at the river's edge. It was the glint of sun on meal that brought it to his attention. He moved closer . . . and what he saw made his brain whirl and his stomach heave.

The partly decomposed body of a man lay there. Somehow the flesh of the face was still preserved and a single glance told him who, the man had been. The Baron Hokadi! Mace was certain it was the Baron. For, during their combats, he had noticed something peculiar about the Baron's face—a black dragon, tattoed across his forehead. The corpse bore that same tatoo.

Mace fell back, away from the horrible sight, while stunned realization flooded his mind.

A Japanese aviator had flown a plane and dealth out death in the skies . . . *and had done so while his body lay, dead and rotting, in a jungle clearing!*

And now a tiger lay dead a few yards back in the jungle, the mark of human fingers deep in the fur of its throat . . . *a tiger, where there should have been a man!*

A TALL figure, swaying weakly, moved in a shambling walk across the flying field of an A.V.G. squadron. Several pilots, lounging about the hangars, looked up and caught sight of the wavering figure as it drew near.

"My God!" one of the group yelled in astonishment, "it's Mace Morris!"

They ran to meet the man who had been listed as "missing in action" for over a week. And when they saw the blood-soaked bandage about his naked waist and met the man's feverish gaze, they put their arms about him and led him toward the doctor's hut.

But as they passed the rude operations shack, Mace broke away from those restraining arms. Slowly, with faltering steps, he went into the shack, the others following with unspoken wonder in their faces. Straight to the bulletin board he went, and taking a small replica of a Japanese flag from the rack, he pasted it with trembling hands in a blank space between two others on the board.

Under that newly-filled space two words had been previously scrawled. They read: *Baron Hokadi.*

THE LITTLE THINGS IN LIFE

"LOST, in Main Street, pair of cotton gloves, slightly worn. Finder please phone . . . Reward."

Advertisements such as this appear in the Dutch provincial press in whole series, indicating a growing shortage of minor articles which formerly would not be worth the trouble of tracing. A weekly paper in North Brabant province contained a long list of such advertisements, asking for the return of a pencil drawing, a fountain pen, a pair of scissors, and other trivial possessions, which would have cost less than the advertising charges.

This scarcity has also caused a tremendous price increase for such articles. The German-controlled weekly *Haagsche Post* complained in a recent issue that the prices of such everyday items as neckties, razor blades, scratch paper, crockery, brushes, dusters and other small household articles have risen an average of one thousand per cent. Repair rates for clothing and shoes have reached such abnormal levels that they often approximate the pre-war cost of the articles themselves.—*Fran Miles.*

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NEARLY 75 years ago an English astronomer found a strange yellowish color flaring in the atmosphere of the sun. Since it was utterly different from any tint known on earth, the astronomer realized that it must be caused by the incandescence of an unknown element. Sir Joseph Lockyer named this finding "helium," after the Greek word for sun.

An American, W. F. Hilldebrand, first chanced on helium in the earth. In 1894, he heated a heavy mineral conglomerate and there boiled out minute quantities of a strange gas. Dr. Hilldebrand mistook the gas for nitrogen, and so missed credit for the discovery.

By years of laborious work at Dutch physicist extracted a few dozen cubic feet of the gas, but it cost him $1800 per cubic foot. Next to hydrogen it was the lightest substance known, having a weight only about one-seventh that of air. However, everybody knew it was too scarce and expensive to be of any practical value.

Today the United States Bureau of Mines is taking helium from wells in Texas at less than two cents a cubic foot; and in a single year has bottled up more than 15 million cubic feet. Yet outside the United States, helium remains little more than a laboratory curiosity.

In 1903, in a southern Kansas farming district near Dexter a test oil well suddenly erupted with a geyserlike roar. This flow proved to be gas, not oil, and immediately there were visions of piping it into houses and factories as a fuel.

The first and most insistent demand was that of the medical men who discovered its virtues as a therapeutic material. Seventy-nine percent of our air is nitrogen. We breathe it in only to breathe it out again unused, while our lungs absorb the 21 percent of oxygen. A doctor, watching an asthma victim struggle for breath, wondered if a lighter air would have any favorable effect. A helium-oxygen mixture was substituted and this synthetic atmosphere was tried, and it is now an accepted treatment for acute asthma in various well-known hospitals.

Not only in asthma, but in other ailments involving breathing difficulties, as in the deep sea diver's affliction called "the bends," helium is proving effective. It is also helpful in certain techniques of administering anesthetics.

Congress amended the law which prohibited the sale of government helium and the gas may now be sold to the public, and its availability may yet promote an enormous development of commercial lighter-than-air craft.

"BLIND AS A BAT" is one of those familiar paradoxic phrases in common use. For it is certainly strange to speak of a bat as blind and then realize that this non-seeing animal flies gaily about in complete darkness—a very daring activity indeed for an animal that supposedly cannot see. Scientists put their agile brains to work on this question and emerged with a surprising and unexpected answer.

The experiment conducted was to cross a darkened room with innumerable wires. Then selected bats over whose eyes adhesive tape had been placed were released into the pitch black room. Their ability to fly around easily without bumping into the wires or each other was not impaired in the slightest degree.

Then the tape was removed from their eyes and placed over their ears. This time, when released into the room, they were like blind humans. They were completely unable to avoid either the wires, the walls, or even each other.

Exactly the same thing occurred when the tape was placed over their mouths. With their eyes uncovered and their mouths taped these bats collided with everything in the room as they flew wildly about.

How could this be explained? Do bats see with their ears—or with their mouths? Careful tests showed that this was practically the case. Microphone detectors, when placed in the room, demonstrated it to be filled with high-pitched squeaks which were inaudible to the human ear alone. These shrill cries sent out by the bats in flight were reflected off the walls, the wires, and even each other and returned to the sensitive ears of the bat to warn him that it is approaching an obstacle to its progress.

This was nature's way of assuring safe aerial navigation to the bat. Scientists, taking this lead, have copied the technique in the various types of detectors developed during the war. Even greater, more constructive uses will be developed in the future. Here again is evidence of nature's service: a simple fact in nature, investigated and utilized by science, has been put to the use of mankind.

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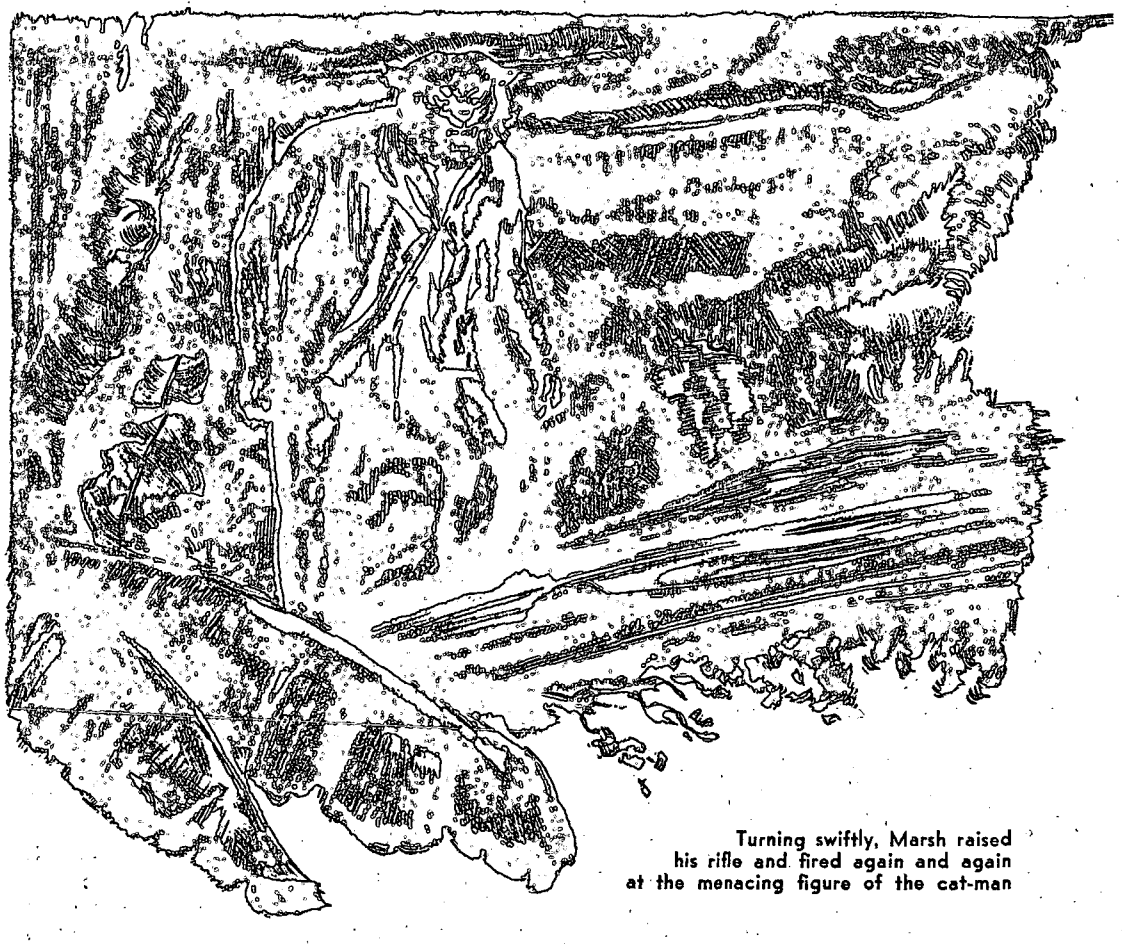

Turning swiftly, Marsh raised his rifle and fired again and again at the menacing figure of the cat-man

VLIET KRUGER angrily threw aside his newspaper.

"Pah!" His voice was a mixture of scorn and disgust. "Pah!" he exclaimed again. "These sportsmen hunters. Killers all! I tell you, Paul, there'll be no game left in all Africa if these trophy hunters have their way."

Paul Marsh's gray eyes looked with humor and affection at the brick-red face of his friend.

"Easy now, Vliet," he said softly. "It'd be rather difficult to police the whole veldt just because a man wants to hunt."

Kruger took a long pull at his gin squash, then banged the glass down on the table top.

"Damn them I say!" he shouted, his whiskey-roughened voice thick with rage. "I don't mind a man going out to hunt. There's plenty of big stuff. Enough to go around. It's these butchers——"

"I know," Marsh interjected. His voice was still soft but the cold light of anger began to glow in his eyes. "But what can you do about it?"

Kruger shook his big blond head sadly.

"Aye, Paul, you're right," he said. He was silent for a few seconds, his eyes intent on the half-filled glass. "What is it Paul—the war?"

Marsh shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Seems to me the whole damned world's turned killer," Kruger continued. "Like this rich American that's

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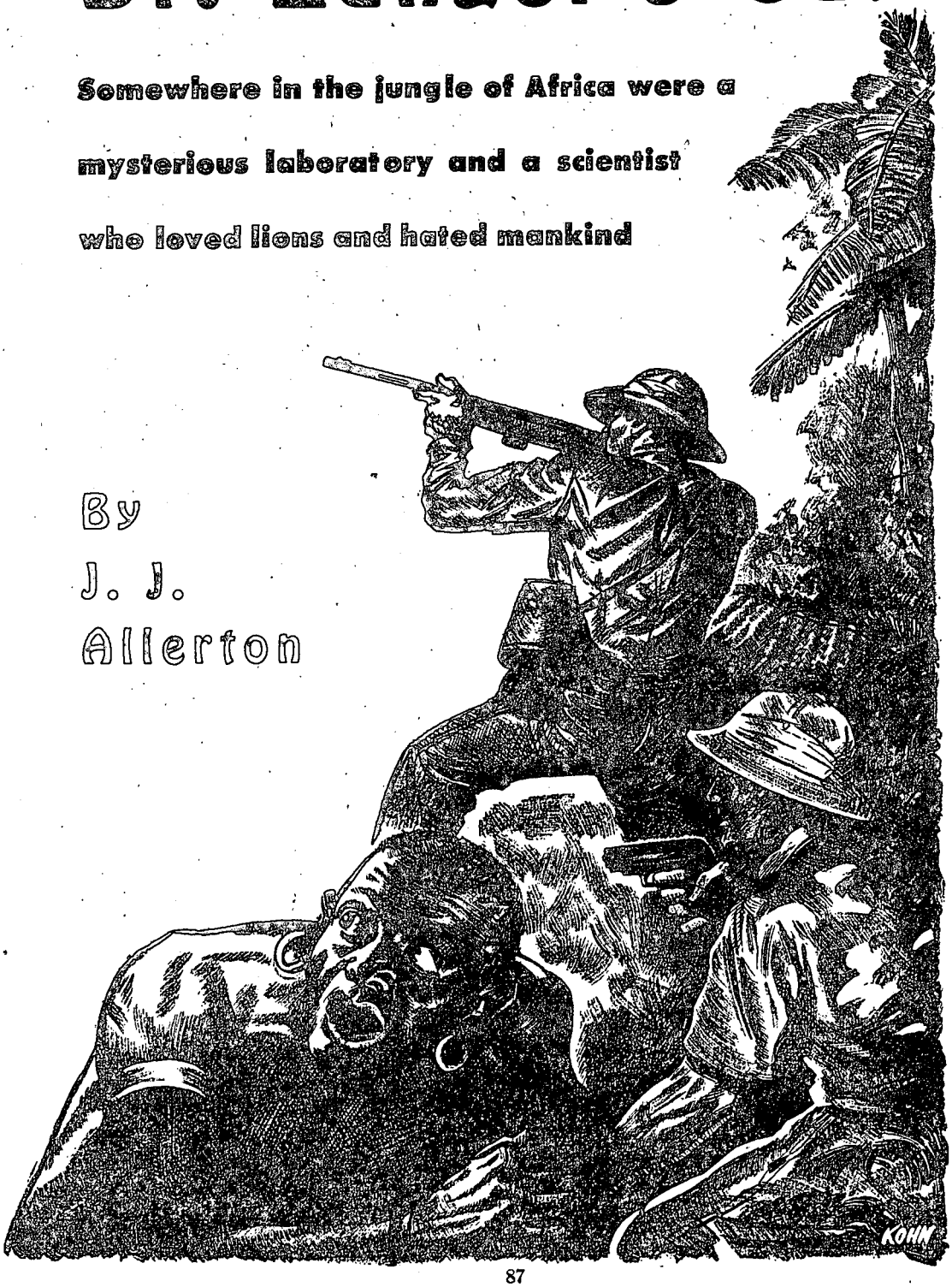
Dr. Zanger's Cats

Somewhere in the jungle of Africa were a mysterious laboratory and a scientist who loved lions and hated mankind

By
J. J.
Allerton



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come over 'for a bit of sport', as he calls it. I've met men like him before. Big-mouthed, big-bellied, big-necked men; and all gun crazy. The kind of men who shoot at anything, for the sheer joy of killing."

"Vliet! What the devil's wrong with you?" Marsh demanded in exasperation.

"Oh hell, Paul! It was that write-up in the paper, about some American who's come over for the hunting. Guess it got under my skin."

The two men were sitting at a small table in the Guide's Room of the Veldt Club, probably the most exclusive club in Johannesburg. For the entrance fee of the Veldt Club was the head of a lion—a lion which the would be member himself must have slain.

Kaffir boys in white shirts and trousers paraded to and from the service bar at one side of the Guide's Room. The square, high-ceilinged room was full of smoke and sound. It was a man's room exclusively; talk was rough and laughter loud. And the men who sat at the small tables or lounged in the comfortable chairs and divans, were men of the open spaces.

Paul Marsh and Vliet Kruger were such men. Guides both; men who took out the safaris or the scientific expeditions to inaccesible, little-known places of Africa. Central Africa, that great region of mystery, jungle, mountain and plain, was as open to these men as the palms of their hands.

They had just returned from Bechuanaland with a party of anthropologists who had been interested in the gorillas of the region. And of course their first stop in Johannesburg was the Veldt Club.

"No use getting worked up about it, Vliet. We've met men like those before——"

"I beg your pardon."

THEY turned startled faces toward the unexpected sound. A tall man, dressed in the conventional whites of the tropics, confronted them. He had approached so silently that only his voice betrayed his presence.

"Paul Marsh?" he asked, looking at both in turn. His voice had a low, purring quality.

"I am Marsh," said Paul.

"Good," said the stranger. "Permit me—I am Doctor Zanger. May I sit down?"

"Yes. Of course," said Marsh. The gray eyes made a casually frank inspection of the man who called himself Doctor Zanger. They took in the rich, golden-colored hair, the deeply tanned face, the strange tawny eyes, green-flecked, and noticed the size of the man. He was so well proportioned that people did not realize how big he was. But when he sat down, he dwarfed the other two.

Zanger smiled, revealing strong white teeth.

"Do I pass inspection, Marsh?" he asked, his eyes showing amusement.

Paul Marsh felt annoyance, as if caught in some childish prank.

Doctor Zanger went on as though he hadn't asked the question:

"I'm looking for a guide. The secretary of the Club suggested you; said you were the best in the business—and that is what I need."

Marsh remained silent. The doctor smiled and continued:

"A friend of mine—an American—is coming up to see me. I promised him some sport. But my place is in such a devilish spot, I'm going to need guides. So I've come to you."

"Where's this place at?" Marsh asked.

"Up in Kenya State."

"Kenya? What's so devilish about that region?"

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Zanger's polite smile reminded Marsh of a cat's grin.

"Sorry," Zanger said apologetically. "Should have explained. I'm a scientist and my place is up-river, near Molubi. Wild sort of country but precisely what I wanted. Good hunting to be had there; cat, leopard and—*white* rhino!"

Kruger whistled softly as Marsh exclaimed:

"White rhino! You're making the trip sound worthwhile. I've never seen one, much as I've heard of them."

"Truth," said Zanger. "Seen one myself. So what d'you say? I'm prepared to pay anything within reason."

"You'll have to take Kruger, here. And our boy, M'gabi."

"I know all about them and it's quite all right."

"Very well, Doctor," Marsh said. "Name the time."

CHAPTER II

KRUGER removed his helmet and wiped the sweat from the inner band with a thick forefinger.

"Hell, Paul, I don't like it!" he grumbled.

Marsh grinned down at his companion.

"What's wrong now, Vliet?"

"Look at this pest-hole. What'd we have to come out here for? Lord knows we could have gotten something better."

Marsh's eyes followed Kruger's gaze. He could understand the other's apathy for the job they had taken. Molubi wasn't the best town in Africa. Several dozen grass-thatched huts fronted the roadway of the single street. At one end was the Magistrate's house—a white, two-storied building—and at the other end was the Java river.

M'gabi, a giant of a Zulu, came out of one of the warehouses, carrying their gun cases. Although each case contained two heavy elephant guns, M'gabi carried them as lightly as though they contained feathers.

"Here. Set them right here, Gabi," Marsh directed. "We've got to wait for the man Zander's sending down."

They didn't have long to wait. A power cruiser came scudding around a bend in the river and came to rest, lightly, against the wharf on which the three men were standing.

Paul Marsh felt his chin drop, and a startled grunt was wrung from Kruger. The occupant of the motor boat was a *girl!*

Her trim figure was clothed in breaches, boots and a soft shirt, open at the throat. Covering the golden brown wealth of hair was a wide-brimmed sun helmet. Blue eyes laughed up at the men.

"You must be Paul Marsh," she said. At his nod, she continued, "Well, I'm Ann Nicholls. My dad and I are visiting Doctor Zanger. . . . But don't just stand there! Come into the boat and we'll be off."

As they made themselves comfortable along the wide planking which ran around the boat's side and served as a bench, she continued to throw words over her shoulder:

"When Doctor Zanger told us he was expecting you at Molubi today, I begged to come down and get you. So here I am."

"Uh, yes, I see. So here you are, "Marsh made dry comment, and wondered what this beautiful and obviously well-to-do, hot-house society bud was doing in the back country. As though in answer to his silent speculation, she said:

"Dad's an old friend of Zanger's. When he got the cable asking him to come out . . . why, I decided to come too."

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Marsh remained silent, eyes intent on the river. Kruger pulled a blackened briar from a hip pocket and sucked silently on the short bit.

Zanger's place was a two hour's trip for the high-powered cruiser. It would have taken them a whole day to have made the trip by native boat.

The girl continued to chatter as the boat moved swiftly up the brownish-colored stream. But, as the men continued to remain silent, seeming to pay no attention to her talk, she too became silent. Yet Marsh felt that she was aware of them. He caught the several looks of interest she had thrown back over her shoulder.

THE Java was not a wide river; at times the thick jungle growth seemed to form an arch, under which they sped, so that the surprise of first seeing Zanger's place was heightened by the suddeness with which they saw it. In one second they were speeding under a green tunnel of arching branches; in the next, they were out in the open, in the wide basin on which Zanger's farm fronted.

As the boat drifted in to the long pier jutting out into the water, Marsh observed the surroundings with an appreciative glance. Zanger had done well by himself.

A large area, at least a quarter mile square, had been shorn of all jungle growth. Set back from the river about a hundred yards, was a large, single-storied, L-shaped house. Two figures came trotting from it, toward their boat.

The figures proved to be native house boys, come to carry whatever baggage there might be, to the house.

Doctor Zanger, as impressive in breeches and boots as he had been in whites, was waiting on the wide, cool veranda to greet them. Beside him stood a roly-poly figure of a man.

"My dad," Ann whispered as they came up.

Zanger shook each by the hand and introduced them to Nicholls.

"Well, Marsh," the doctor said as they stepped inside, "What d'you think of my haven of science?"

"Very nice. But I can't say it looks like my idea of a laboratory."

"I didn't intend it to," Zanger replied. There was a hidden something in the words that Marsh didn't understand. But Zanger was talking again:

"I'll have a boy show you to your room. No need to dress for dinner. Then we'll talk over the trip. I can tell you, Nicholls is very keen about it."

THE room which Zanger had assigned to Marsh and Kruger proved to be a large one. French windows, screened, opened directly on the verandah. A bathroom provided them with shower and tub. They wasted no time in taking advantage of their accommodations.

Zanger, Nicholls and his daughter were already at the table when the two guides came in to dinner.

The little plump man, his round face beaming in anticipation, said:

"Zanger tells me you're the best guides in all Africa. But would you mind clearing up a point for me? If you're going to guide us, why is Zanger providing natives to take us to the hunting district?"

Marsh laughed.

"It is a rather loose term," he explained. "Actually, we're hunters. Track down the animals, and so forth. In fact, years ago we were called hunters. Now—well, guide seems to be the more fashionable word."

"You seem to be rather young for a guide."

Marsh looked across the table to the

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girl, who had made that last remark. He said:

"My father was one. And I was taught to ride and hunt almost as soon as I could walk. What my father did not teach me, Vliet did." He laid his hand on Kruger's arm in an affectionate gesture. The older man colored in pleasure at the unexpected compliment. Marsh said:

"By the way, Doctor, we haven't seen our boy. I hope he's comfortable."

"Oh yes. Put him up with my servants, in their wing. Fine physical specimen. Zulu, isn't he?"

"Yes. M'gabi was my father's gunbearer. Then, when Dad died, he transferred his affection to me. Doesn't look it, but he's in his sixties. Isn't he Vliet?"

Kruger answered briefly:

"Yes. Good stock too. Father was a chief with old Cetawayo."

Ann Nicholls then wanted to know who Cetawayo was, and the rest of the evening was spent in talking about the Transvaal during the days of Cecil Rhodes. It was in the midst of a discussion on the empire Rhodes had built, when Zanger said:

"It's a pity, too. Africa really belongs to the natives, you know. And who can tell? Perhaps it will be returned to them one of these days."

"What do you mean, Doctor?" Marsh asked.

Zanger shrugged his shoulders for an answer.

"Like to see my laboratory?" he asked instead.

His guests eagerly admitted that they would.

Zanger preceded them to the rear of the house. He opened a door and pressed a light switch on the wall. Indirect lighting came to life on ceiling and wall. Two oversize operating tables stood in the center of the large, white-walled room. A battery of spotlights hung suspended from the ceiling, directly over the tables.

"Your hospital, Doctor?" Marsh asked.

"No, Marsh. A quite natural mistake you've made. I'm not a physician. Biology is my profession."

"H'm. I see you don't work with guinea pigs."

"I don't," Zanger answered shortly.

Kruger had been sniffing loudly.

"Smells like blood," he said suddenly.

Marsh, who had been looking at Nicholls when Kruger spoke, noticed the little man go pale, at the mention of the word "blood."

"Right. Performed an experiment this afternoon. Successful, too. Might tell you about it—later." Zanger said lightly. His tawny eyes held deep amusement.

MARSH suddenly felt uneasy. Nor could he say why. But he didn't like Doctor Zanger. There was something strange going on here. He couldn't understand what amused Zanger so. One thing he knew: Nicholls was afraid of the doctor. He was brought back from his thoughts by Ann.

"Oh, Doctor, I meant to ask you: What happened last night?"

There was something cat-like in the way Zanger suddenly turned to the girl.

"What happened last night?" he demanded.

"Why—why," she began confusedly, "I thought I heard someone scream in pain."

Surprisingly it was her father who spoke:

"You probably heard Doctor Zanger's cats, my dear."

"Cats?" Marsh repeated, curious.

For once, Zanger's eyes were serious.

"Yes cats—leopards and lions. In

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pens, behind the house. Use them in my experiments."

Zanger turned abruptly and started out of the room. There was nothing else to do but follow him.

Later, as Marsh was undressing he voiced to Kruger the questions on his mind.

"Somehing very peculiar about all this," he said in conclusion.

Kruger snorted in disgust.

"I told you, Paul, I didn't like it from the beginning. This whole set-up stinks! I smelled those cats, minute we got close to the house. There must be hundreds of them. And those servants he's got; notice them, Paul? They're Howli men—the last of the cannibals. Something wrong here."

But it wasn't until after they turned off the lights, that they discovered how wrong things were. They were barely settled between cool white sheets, when a tapping came at the glass of the French doors.

Marsh saw a huge shape outlined against the glass. Instinctively he reached for the automatic pistol he had placed on the chair beside the bed. Then he realized who it was. M'gabi!

"Baas," the Zulu began, when they admitted him, "M'gabi no want stay with servants."

"Why? What's wrong, Babi?" Marsh asked.

"No servants! *Bata* men!" came the answer.

"Leopard men!" Kruger whispered in surprise. "Say," he demanded fiercely of no one in particular, "what goes on here? Howli's and Bata men from the Congo. Pens full of lions and leopards. That laboratory stinking of human blood. Let's get out, Paul."

"That was it," Paul said, as if reminded of something. "Human blood! I knew I'd recognized that odor."

He went back to the bed and sat down. Kruger and the Zulu watched him intently. He looked up at last and said in a tone that brooked no argument:

"We'll stay and see what it's all about. That girl; can't just leave her. Gabi, go back and keep your eyes and ears open," he commanded. "Tomorrow, I'm going to pump Zanger."

Kruger started to say something. Then, thinking better of it, he followed Paul between the sheets again.

Try as he would, Paul couldn't fall asleep. Blue eyes and golden brown hair kept intruding into his consciousness. When finally he managed to doze off, scores of men who strangely resembled leopards marched in and out of his sleep. And once he awoke with the sound of a scream echoing in his ears. He sat up, alert, waiting to learn if it would be repeated. But the only sound he heard was the hoarse snoring of Kruger, asleep beside him.

CHAPTER III

A HOUSE boy came in early the next morning. Marsh gave him a close look. Kruger was right: the boy was a Howli. There was no mistaking that long, flat head. Only the Howli's did that to their children—that and filing their teeth down to points. But there was one thing wrong with the picture. Batas and Howlis were sworn enemies!

Zanger was alone in the cool dining room, having a cup of coffee. He watched the tall figure of Marsh and noticed the hard set of his jaw. There was purpose and determination written all over him.

"Ah! Morning, Marsh. Coffee?"

"Yes, thanks," Paul answered, matching the other's casual politeness.

"Well, Marsh, how do you like my place?" Zanger asked. He was sitting,

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one leg thrown over the other, comfortably at ease. Nor did he change position when Marsh answered:

"I don't! I don't like Leopard-men or cannibals. Not for house boys. What puzzles me is how you manage to keep them from each other's throats. And another thing——"

What the other thing was, had to wait. A house boy came running in, his face gleaming with sweat and excitement, and broke into an excited chattering.

Zanger listened for an instant, then arose in a single fluid motion.

"Better come along, Marsh," he threw over his shoulder. "Your boy seems to be in trouble."

Zanger didn't seem to be moving fast, yet he reached the servant's wing a dozen paces ahead of Marsh. A strange tableau met their eyes when they stepped over the threshold. Half a dozen natives squatted on their heels around a prostrate figure on the floor. It was M'gabi!

Marsh joined Zanger, who was already examining the black. Blood trickled thickly down the Zulu's face. Zanger's long fingers were feeling along the edges of the wound—a long inch-wide slash, which ran from M'gabi's forehead back across the left temple and ended just above his left ear.

"Lucky," said Zanger succinctly. "A little deeper . . ." He left the rest unsaid but Marsh understood.

"How'd it happen?" Marsh asked savagely, his temper no longer under control.

Zanger looked up at hearing the suddenly savage tone. He shrugged his shoulders but began to ask questions of the men still squatting on their heels. Silence greeted his questions. Then something happened that made Marsh's eyes go wide in amazement. Zanger was talking to one of the men, a broad-shouldered thick-necked, surly-faced black, when the man deliberately turned his head away. Zanger rose and, stepping to the other's side, put his hand on the native's shoulder. The black shrugged the hand away. Then Zanger *sank his fingers deep into the flesh of the shoulder,* lifted the man erect, and slapped him.

THERE was a sharp crack, as the native was sent sprawling across the room. It reminded Marsh of a lion's slap and had much the same effect. The native lay where he had fallen. The other blacks, their faces reflecting the fear they felt, moved away from Zanger.

As if nothing had happened, Zanger turned to the wide-eyed Marsh and said:

"Don't worry about your boy. Just a flesh wound. Should be up and around tonight — after I treat him. Pretty tough heads, these natives have."

Marsh followed the other's lead:

"You talk Bata, I notice. What'd they say? How did my boy get into it?"

"Didn't say much. You know these men. Sullen; like to fight. He probably said something they didn't like. Ganged up on him."

They crossed, again, the carefully tended plot of garden ground. Marsh noticed for the first time the high stone fence behind the house. It did not extend very far. But leading away from it on either side was a ten-foot barbed-wire fence. His nose and ears told him of the lions and leopards in their cages beyond the fence.

Unaccountable, yet tangible, dread seized Marsh. It was as if an inner voice had suddenly said, "Beware."

"Look, Zanger," he said, his voice betraying a little of his feelings, "about this hunt. Like to get it over as quick-

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ly as possible. So——"

"Of course, Marsh. I was about to tell you, when we were interrupted. Made arrangements for your porters. Shouldn't be long. Fifty miles up-river, a little hill country—and there you are."

"Thanks, Zanger."

The interior felt cool. Marsh found himself sweating profusely. Seeing Ann and her father in the dining room, he excused himself and went to his room to change.

Kruger was just leaving, as he arrived.

"Why didn't you wake me?" the older man asked.

Marsh laughed.

"The old bushmaster sleeps well in a civilized bed," he chided Kruger.

"Pah!" Kruger grunted. "Too much softness. . . . What happened?"

Marsh looked his surprise. How did Kruger know something had happened?

"Your face—it's like a thundercloud," Kruger explained.

Marsh told him and went in to change into cooler clothes.

CHAPTER IV

ANN NICHOLLS looked up and saw that her first impression of Marsh had been correct. He *was* handsome. His tall sinewy leanness hid strength. His face was a little thin, she decided, but it only made him better looking.

Marsh, unaware of the thoughts behind her clear, blue eyes, gave somber greeting to Nicholls and his daughter and sat down to his bacon and eggs.

"By the way, Marsh," Zanger said, turning from a conversation with Nicholls, "your boy asked for you."

"Good." Marsh started to rise, but sat down again when Zanger said:

"Not now. See him later. Shock. Should rest."

"Okay."

"Mr. Marsh——"

He looked over the rim of his coffee cup at Ann.

"Mind walking with me?" she said softly.

He looked around. Zanger was still engrossed in a low-voiced conversation with Nicholls. Kruger had left the room.

She was smiling, when he looked back to her. "Looks like you're caught."

"Does, for a fact. Let's go."

She led him away from the house, toward the river.

"Tell me," she said, as they sat with their legs dangling over the edge of the wharf, "where did you learn this—this American way of talking?"

"In America. To be exact, at an air station near Lordsburg, New Mexico."

"Oh!" The single word managed to express the thrill she felt. "Tell me more."

"Nothing much to tell. I was wounded in combat and headquarters decided my talents could be put to use teaching. Sent me from England to the States, and there I was. Almost wish I were back."

"Why?"

"Because . . . well . . . Look, Ann how well do you know Zanger?"

She stared at him.

"Why . . . not very well. But Dad does. Anything wrong?"

"N-no. That is, I don't know. Tell me something about him."

He was looking out over the great width of the river. She too looked at the green growth on the far shore, but continued to stare at the lean face from the corner of her eye.

"Well, Doctor Zanger is a world famous biologist. Something to do with blood plasma. I know he has been credited with the saving of thousands of lives during the war——"

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MEMORY returned with a rush to Paul Marsh. Nineteen forty-four! A hell-fire of flak over Augsburg. Searing splinters of steel tearing into his body. The crash landing on the Autumn quagmire of mud they called a field, near Chantilly. The base hospital and the whispered words over his pain racked body, "Zanger! He's the only one who can do it!" The awakening and the nurse's awe-filled whisper: "Doctor Zanger! His method of transfusion. Wonderful! It saved your life."

So this was Zanger.

"— and Dad's financing this new experiment. Doctor Zanger told Dad it's revolutionary."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said that dad's—Why, you weren't even listening! And how I've been raving on. That's cruel, Paul Marsh."

He was contrite. "I'm sorry."

She saw he meant it and her anger vanished.

"Dad says we're going out tomorrow, Paul. I can't tell you how thrilled I am. My first hunt." A thought occurred which dispelled the gaiety in her eyes. "Is there danger, Paul?"

He smiled and patted her hand reassuringly.

"There is always danger. Particularly rhinos. They seem to have no sense of discretion. A lion will run, unless wounded. Even an elephant runs. But rhinos—h'm. They get your scent, stick their armored heads down and come at a charge. A most impressive sight . . . from the safety of some large tree," he added, his eyes twinkling with humor.

She realized, for the first time, the dangers of his calling. And was conscious also of another feeling, a newer, more thrilling one. She was beginning to care for this man. The gay mood vanished. It was a silent and contemplative woman who returned to Zanger's house. The man, too, was thoughtful. But for another reason.

Kruger called to them from the library.

"Nice chap, Zanger," he announced, returning to the depths of the cushioned chair from which the arrival of Marsh and Ann had taken him. "Sits me down and brings me schnapps. Invites me to read his books. And good books they are, too. Should like him, but ——" He hesitated, looking side-long at Ann. She saw that he wanted to talk privately with Marsh. Excusing herself, she left the two together.

"Spill it, Vliet," Marsh said, idly turning the pages of a book.

"I don't know, Paul. P'raps I sound childish . . . but Zanger reminds me of a big cat I once saw in a Zoo! The eyes of both seem to say, 'Ah, if I could get out!' "

"I understand what you mean, Vliet," Paul said. He noticed the pages of the book were illustrated with lion pictures. Lions! Damn it! He had lions on the brain.

"Well, Vliet, we'll be out of here in the morning. Guess we can stand Zanger for the rest of the afternoon, eh?"

It wasn't hard. Zanger and Nicholls seemed to have vanished. Marsh and Kruger spent the balance of the afternoon going over their express rifles. Jungle damp made necessary heavy oiling of the rifles. Both were too jungle-wise to take the chance of their rifles not firing during a hazardous moment.

It was Marsh who first noticed the odd sound. It was a roaring sound, as of an approaching wind storm. He listened closely. Then he placed it—the concerted roar of many lions. He wondered idly what had disturbed them.

Vliet answered his thought. "Sound hungry, don't they, Paul?"

"Wonder what Zanger feeds them?

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And why he needs so many?"

Kruger shrugged his shoulders and continued cleaning the rifles.

The lions became silent after a while. The two men finished their work and went into the dining room. There, they discovered to their relief that they were to eat alone. Whatever was occupying the attentions of Zanger and Nicholls, was keeping them from dinner. Ann, too, had evidently found something to do during the dinner hour. Silence kept them company as they ate.

When they returned to their room they went to bed immediately. The jungle night had fallen and a huge moon gave almost daylight illumination to the outdoors. Marsh's thoughts were not on the moon, however. He was thinking of the morrow and the hunt. Sleep came slowly . . .

AT FIRST Marsh thought it was Kruger's hand on his shoulder. Then he heard the whispered words:

"Baas! Wake!"

Beside him, Kruger hoarsely demanded:

"What's up, Gabi? What happened?"

Marsh could see the long white patch across M'gabi's temple, and the whites of his eyes. All else blended with the darkness of the room.

"Baas," M'gabi went on in terrified tones, "no go hunt! Me hear Bata men talk. Goin' kill lady, man, Baas Kruger, you. No porters. Bata men—Howli men. Ketch M'gabi listen."

"How did you get here?" asked Marsh.

"Guard turn back," was the simple explanation.

"Did you see the Doctor and the other man?" Marsh asked.

The black became even more terrified at the mention of Zanger.

"No good, Baas! Him witch-man. Me 'fraid. Dey want do something with M'gabi."

"Come on, Vliet. Let's find Zanger and get to the bottom of these monkey-shines. I don't want Batas and Howlis for porters. You come too, Gabi," he ordered.

The house was in darkness, but as they approached the laboratory, Marsh saw a narrow border of light at the bottom of the door. He didn't bother knocking but just walked in.

Zanger, in surgeon's gown and mask was stooped over one of the operating tables. Nicholls, also masked, was watching the Doctor intently. Marsh was amazed to see the body of a lion stretched out on one table. And on the other, over which Zanger was stooping, was the naked body of a black man. Both lion and man seemed dead.

Behind him, Marsh could hear the slow measured breathing of Kruger and the sharper, more sibilant exhalations of M'gabi. Those small sounds were submerged however in the deeper, louder sounds of electrical apparatus at work. In the few seconds the tableau was sustained, Marsh saw the gigantic centrifuge and the small, oddly shaped pump with the bellows attachment. Then Zanger broke the spell.

"Ah, Marsh! Come in, gentlemen and close the door. I see your boy found you. Good! Well, I promised to show you my experiment. You are just in time to see the last, but one."

The Doctor's words came clearly through the gauze of his mask. Behind him, Marsh heard the hoarse muttering of Kruger: "To hell with that, Paul. Tell him off and let's get out."

But Marsh knew, without being told, that getting out was not to be so easy. This mystery, he felt, was soon to come to a climax. And Marsh had already made up his mind to stay. He accepted Zanger's invitation. And with Kruger

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and M'gabi crowding his shoulders, he came forward to stand beside Nicholls.

He could feel the self-satisfied smirk behind Zanger's mask as the biologist began to talk.

"The culmination of a lifetime's work. The explanation would be too technical for you, Marsh, but I will give you a practical demonstration."

HE FLIPPED a switch at the side of the table and the hum of the centrifuge became more audible and the pump gave voice to a beat, steady and rhythmatic. Marsh saw that the bellows at the side of the pump was in operation.

"Reminds you of a human heart, doesn't it?" said Zanger. "Expand, contract; expand, contract. Precisely what it is: *this man's heart*. For his body is dead during the time the bloods mix in the centrifuge.

"You see, Marsh, I have done what science says can't be done. I have crossed a lion with a man. Not as Burbank did with plant life, but in another way. Through the blood stream, that mysterious source of life. Watch!"

He flipped another switch and the red liquid in the large glass tube of the centrifuge began a mad, whirling dance. Red bubbles formed and broke into foam. Bit by bit the level of the blood was lowered. Rubber tubes led from the centrifuge to the pump and thence to the operating tables. Marsh saw that two of the tubes were attached to the native.

What happened then made Marsh's eyes blink in horror; while a fervent and appealing, "Good God!" was wrung from Kruger's lips.

Slowly, the blood had flowed from the tube, until it reached the half-way mark, and in a few seconds a transformation took place in the black, which made Marsh think he was losing his senses.

Before their very eyes, the native's head began to alter its shape. Ears lengthened and became furry. The eyes became oblique in shape. The canine teeth protruded over the lower lip. Paws formed at the ends of the wrists. Hair made its appearance all over the body. *The black had been changed into a lion.*

"Aah!". There was elation in the Doctor's voice. "Another success! You see, Marsh, I have given to the man certain physical characteristics of the lion. More, he will have the cunning and courage of the animal, too."

"Why?" The word was more than a question. It was a demand. A condemnation.

Slowly Zanger removed mask and gown.

Again the inexplorable demand: "Why?"

"Because, my dear Marsh, I am not satisfied with the *status quo*. So I shall make a change, of my own devising. Africa belong to the natives. It shall revert to them. To them and to the animals."

"Zanger, you're mad!"

"No, he isn't! He's right and I am going to finance this whole thing." It was the roly-poly Nicholls who had burst suddenly into speech.

Marsh turned a wondering glance on the little man.

"Did Zanger tell you also of his plans for you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Go ahead, Zanger. Tell him what you had in mind for us on the hunt. Why the porters are who they are."

Zanger had walked to a porcelain sink while Marsh was talking. He had taken up a large syringe and, after filling it with a colorless liquid, injected the contents into the native. The effect was instantaneous. In the twink-

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ling of an eye, the black assumed his normal body. Then Zanger turned to answer.

"I see your boy told you what he overheard. Not that it will do you any good."

SOME sixth sense made Marsh whirl. The meaning of the scientist's words was made clear. Two of the Batas, rifles held ready, were at the open door behind them.

"You see, Marsh," Zanger continued, "I had prepared for any contingency. Of course, you know my original plan. H'm . . ." He was silent in thought for a few seconds. Marsh glanced at Nicholls and saw how pale the little man had become. It was all too evident that he was completely at a loss as to what was going on.

"Of course!" Zanger said incisively. "I can have your *bodies* brought to the scene of the hunt to be discovered at the proper time."

"Zanger! Zanger! What about me?" Nicholls bleated.

"You? You have served your purpose," Zanger replied.

"You mean you brought me down here just to have me mu-murdered?"

"Well, not until we'd signed that partnership agreement."

Nicholls brought his palm to his mouth in a start of horror as Marsh saw through the whole plot. Nicholls had money—a great deal of it evidently. He guessed that a sort of agreement had been made—the sort where all of one partner's possessions reverted to the other in case of death. Zanger was mad, but there was a devil's brain behind the madness.

Now that the suspense of waiting and wondering was over, Marsh felt a sense of balance return to him. He always experienced this surging tide of confidence once the emergency presented itself. Reason told him that Zanger was the sort of madman who loved to show his power. He would first permit them a certain amount of freedom before putting them out of the way. Good! Time was what they needed.

Marsh chose his words carefully. He didn't want to anger Zanger into taking the final step prematurely.

"Aren't you afraid you're biting off more than you can chew, Zanger? This is 1946; not the day of Rhodes. Your blacks and animals wouldn't stand a chance against machine guns and planes."

Zanger laughed. It was a sly, triumphant laugh.

"It is all in my plan, Marsh. These men are my missionaries. I will send them to all the corners of this dark and superstitious continent—to all the Mohammedan sects, ripe for rebellion against the Christian; to the south, where millions of Kaffirs are pawns to the British. They shall see my power, in living proof. Then shall I rule in earnest! Zanger the Magnificent!"

Gone was the clipped, incisive speech. He spoke wildly exultant phrases. Suddenly, he was sly. The words rolled off his tongue, as if they were succulent bits of meat, to be relished before being swallowed:

"I see Ann has taken an interest in you. How sad. But you can go to your death knowing she will be the first empress of this empire I will build."

"Monster! Madman!" Nicholls screamed and leaped at Zanger.

It was the one thing Marsh had feared.

Zanger calmly waited until Nicholls was upon him; then he struck—with clenched fist. The partnership was terminated with that blow. Nicholl's skull was crushed by the blow as effectively as an empty egg shell.

"Get Zanger!" Marsh shouted even

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as he leaped, too late, to Nicholl's rescue. It was certainly *not* what the two men with the rifles would have expected. And as the four, Marsh, Kruger, M'gabi and Zanger were, for a few seconds, an almost compact group, the guards were afraid to fire for fear of hitting Zanger.

MARSH came in from the front, while his friends closed in from the sides. He leaped over the grotesquely huddled body of Nicholls and was greeted by a swinging fist. The fist grazed his shifting head by a fraction of an inch. Then Marsh swung, without waiting to get set, at the same instant Kruger and M'gabi reached Zanger.

The blow staggered the madman momentarily; just long enough for the three to come to close grips with him. It was a mistake Zanger soon rectified.

With a laugh that was more of a snarl, M'gabi held Zanger in a strangle hold. It was his obvious intention to Kill. Kruger too, had in his mind to kill the Doctor. But none had allowed for the almost super-human strength of the scientist.

Although the Zulu was fully as tall and as heavy as Zanger, the white man broke the strangle hold as though the Zulu's grip was of smoke. He reached back and, taking the black's wrist in his fingers, whirled him about like a rag doll. Kruger was sent spinning by M'gabi's whirling body which also caught Marsh a glancing blow; enough to throw him off balance. Before he fell, he saw the blacks raise their rifles.

Oddly enough, it was Zanger who saved them. Marsh was right in his analysis: Zanger knew he held the upper hand and wanted a little sport before putting them to death.

He came close to the three sprawled on the floor. The riflemen flanked him on either side.

"Too bad," he said, his tone syrupy with false commiseration. "You almost succeeded. Almost! Of course I can't permit you another chance." His voice rose. "Get up!"

As they started to rise, he kicked M'bagi full in the belly. Marsh watched the black fall writhing to the floor again.

Kruger mumbled, "I'll make you pay, you crazy fool!"

"Get up!" Zanger's harsh voice commanded again. This time he permitted M'gabi to rise to his feet. Then, with Marsh and Kruger supporting the black, the two Batas marched the three to their quarters. The guards collected four others on the way, two of which immediately took up a post outside the French windows.

Although their position seemed helpless and should have occasioned deep anxiety, Marsh felt fear only for the safety of Ann Nicholls. He knew Zanger wouldn't kill her, but he didn't know exactly what the mad Doctor's intentions were.

The guards stood immobile, their rifles held so they could be quickly put to use. There was something weird in the solemn way they watched the prisoners.

Kruger grunted savagely. "So they're gonna be the super-men of Zanger's new order. Huh!"

"Easy, Vliet," Marsh cautioned. "Let's keep calm until we have another chance at that crazy man."

"That's if we get another chance," the other reminded him.

Marsh shrugged. There was nothing they could do but wait.

THE morning was half gone before Zanger sent for them. The first person Marsh saw as he stepped into the laboratory was Ann Nicholls. On one

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of the operating tables was a sheet-covered body. He surmised that beneath the sheet was the body of the girl's father.

Zanger was his usual bland, smiling self. He was standing beside the grief-stricken girl. At sight of Marsh and his friends a look of intense horror and, oddly enough, disbelief came over her face. Marsh started to cross to her side but one of the guards thrust a rifle barrel in front of him. He was quick to note how Ann shrank close to Zanger when she saw him come forward.

"You see, Ann!"—Zanger's voice was unctious—"how brazen he is; how calloused! Murder first—then an attempt to brazen it out. But of course we will see to it that he does not succeed, eh, Ann?"

"Of course, Carl," came her low reply.

Marsh was stunned. While he hadn't expected Zanger to confess to killing Nicholls, the thought never crossed his mind that the madman would attempt to pin the killing on him.

"Ann!" he said hoarsely, "you can't believe that! Why should I do such a thing? Can't you see—ugh!" His words ended in a groan as the guard struck him across the face with the rifle barrel. He staggered back in a red haze of pain. Blood poured down his chin from torn flesh ripped open by the rifle steel. Dimly he heard the muffled scream of her voice. Then Kruger had his arms around him and he heard the hoarse voice of his friend, cautioning, "Steady, lad. Take it easy."

He shook his head, trying to clear it of pain-fog, and blood made a crimson pattern on the tile floor. Words came thickly from torn lips:

"It's your game so far, Zanger, but——"

"Take them away," Zanger ordered.

Marsh turned for a last look, just before they were pushed through the door. Ann sat in the chair, pitiable and forlorn-looking girl, lost in a world suddenly gone empty for her.

CHAPTER V

PAUL MARSH stretched his arms as far as the cords that bound them would permit. It wasn't very far. But it helped, in a slight degree, the circulation of blood. He could hear Kruger moving, grunting with his efforts to loosen his bonds. But Marsh knew it would be to no avail; their guards had made certain the ropes would not be loosened.

His brain was in a mad whirl of fear for Ann. He did not know what Zanger had in mind for her. But he feared the worst. Lying in this dark, smelly room, bound and helpless, he could still think only of her safety. Hours had gone by since they had been tossed into the room. How many, he did not know; but that night had come could be seen through the single window the room boasted.

The waiting came to a sudden end. The door was flung open and Zanger entered. Marsh could see the figures of several rifle-carrying blacks in the brightly lit corridor outside their prison room. Several of the blacks came into the room and pushed the three bound men to their feet. Then, with Zanger in the lead, they began a processional back to the laboratory.

The laboratory looked oddly unreal in its bare, sterile cleanliness. Ann was no longer there.

Zanger interpreted Marsh's look correctly.

"Poor girl," he said, his voice a mockery of sorrow. "To lose her father and lover, all in one day. How sad. But then look what she will gain:

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a king and a kingdom. Fair exchange, eh, Marsh?"

Marsh was silent to the jibe. Sickness flooded his soul. This was the end. He could see it in Zanger's face. It wouldn't be long now.

"Y'know, Marsh," Zanger continued. He looked like a sardonic, blond devil as he stood before the three men, his figure immaculate as always in white linen, and his fingers held in a sort of benedictory attitude, "Y'know," he repeated, "I've decided to give you men a—well—let's call it a sporting chance, Marsh, you and your friend are hunters. I thought it would be an excellent idea—*if the hunter became the hunted,* understand?

"I see you don't," he continued, as Marsh looked uncomprehendingly at him. "Well, beyond that door lies freedom. But you must win it."

Marsh and Kruger looked at the door in question. Its blank face gave no answer to the riddle Zanger presented. They saw only that, unlike the other doors, this one was both barred and bolted against whatever lay beyond.

But the mystery was soon to end, for Zanger had stepped over and was pressing back the bolts. Steel rasped against steel as the bolts fell back into their sockets.

Zanger beckoned the guards to bring the prisoners forward. When they stood before the open door, Zanger said:

"Up above is the road to freedom. There is only an iron fence beyond the road." As one of the guards cut their bonds, Zanger continued, "Of course you should have no difficulty climbing the fence—if you get that far—that is, if you can find a way to circumvent the obstacle of high-voltage electricity the fence contains."

Then the guards pushed them into the narrow passageway beyond the door. The sound of its closing was as the clanging sound of doom in their ears.

MARSH first rubbed his chafed wrists until he felt the stinging sensation which presaged returning circulation. The other two did the same. Then they examined their surroundings. It was a rather narrow passageway. Kruger's exploring knuckles showed the walls to be made of steel. The floor, smooth concrete, led in a long slope upward. They followed the slope and after fifty feet or so discovered it ended at a blank wall. The tunnel at this end was quite low. Even Kruger, short as he was, had to stoop to keep from striking his head against the ceiling.

"What now?" Kruger asked, when they arrived at the impasse.

Marsh could see nothing in the dark of the tunnel. But he could feel something. A cool draft of air brushed lightly against his cheek. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a match and, after striking it, held it over his head. The flame was being blown down and sideways; there was a crack in the ceiling.

Kruger and M'gabi needed no instructing. They began to run their fingers along the ceiling. It was M'gabi who found the hidden rung. The trap-door opened on well-oiled hinges, and the three men stepped out into the dark night.

Marsh looked about him and felt horror take hold. His eyes didn't have to tell him where he was; his *nose* had already done so. They were standing on a catwalk, perhaps three feet wide, entirely surrounded by hundreds of lions and leopards. For with the opening of the trap-door, the fetid and unmistakeable odor of the animals had come down to meet them.

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Instinctively they turned to retreat back to the tunnel. And found the door silently and mysteriously closed to them. They stood unmoving for a few minutes, attempting to orient themselves to their surroundings.

To the east, above the line of jungle growth, the blackness of night was already blending into the gray of dawn. Behind them was the low, sprawling bulk of the house. The fence which Zanger had mentioned could be seen dimly, several hundred yards away. But what was of prime interest and importance to them was their immediate surroundings.

The catwalk on which they were standing led straight out to the fence. It appeared to be a very simple matter. A walk of some three hundred yards or so over the three-foot-wide planking; and then the fence.

They started off, Marsh in the lead, Kruger and M'gabi bringing up the rear. They hadn't taken ten steps before Marsh understood Zanger's sly grin. The plank path was laid out *over the tops of the animals' cages*. For as they moved ahead in single file, a furry paw streaked upward to lash with ripping claws at Marsh's leg. The lion's blow missed its goal by a matter of inches. Marsh stopped dead in his tracks, while the beast let out a roar of rage, a roar which was echoed and reechoed by the other animals in their cages.

Now they knew what Zanger meant by "a road to freedom." It wasn't a road; it was a tight-rope they were walking. A tight-rope that was six inches wide. For with the first animal's futile slash, the others in their cases to either side of the walk sent up curving, hooking, death-dealing paws of lurking death.

"Careful, Paul!" came Kruger's belated warning.

Marsh stopped and turned to see how the others had fared. They were standing motionless, tense and poised for whatever was to come.

"Looks like a long, tough road," Marsh said banteringly, as he turned and started off again. Although his heart was in his mouth with each step he took, his stride was deliberate.

AS HE strode along he noticed that the cages were fairly narrow. At regular intervals the boardwalk was bisected by other walks. He saw the reason for them. It was the only means by which the animals could be fed. But *what* were they fed? It would take a slaughter-house of beef to feed them.

The concerted sound set up by the enraged beasts sent chills racing up and down the men's spines. Their margin of safety wasn't much. Once Marsh stepped out of line an inch or two and felt the rasping sound of claws against his oiled boots. And once Kruger, in his intense concentration of walking between the borders of danger, took a misstep and felt M'gabi's hand pull him back to safety.

They were a quarter of the way to the fence when it happened. Marsh had been gaining confidence and sureness with each succeeding step. Except for the one time he had miscalculated his step, he had walked without misgiving. Then, without warning, a section of the walk opened just as Marsh stepped upon it. It happened with such suddenness that Kruger wasn't able even to attempt to save him. It wasn't a fall, only a few feet, in fact. But at the end of it was the floor of an animal's cage.

CHAPTER VI

ANN NICHOLLS stirred, then sat up in her bed. Her eyes were red-

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rimmed from crying, her mind in a welter of conflicting and painful thoughts. Paul Marsh—the man whom she loved—the murderer of her father! It seemed impossible. She didn't know what to believe.

She had returned to her room, after seeing the black strike Marsh. For what seemed endless hours she had sat there on the bed trying to puzzle out the reason for what Paul had done. Zanger had told her it was because of his experiments. There had been an argument that culminated in a fight. Paul had struck her father, who had fallen against the edge of the operating table and fractured his skull.

Yet now, as she sat there in the dark, the whole story seemed so unreal. Why, only the previous afternoon Paul had shown he couldn't have known—or were his questions more than just curiosity? Had he been trying to find out something to his own advantage?

She stood up wearily, walked to her dressing table, lit one of the boudoir lamps and looked wonderingly at herself. Before her came a vision of Paul Marsh as she had seen him last: strong and sure of himself, even with his arms and legs in bonds. No! She was certain now. He couldn't have done it! Then who had? She didn't know. But she was going to find out. Right now!

. . . The laboratory door was open and Zanger was in there, seated at his desk in a corner of the room, writing. His back was toward her. The door had opened on well-oiled hinges and she approached him silently.

She was about to speak, when she caught sight of what he was writing. Her eyes grew wide in horror and she took several backward steps. Then full realization of what she had read came over her and she turned to run . . . and stumbled over a low stool, sending it skittering across the floor.

Zanger whirled at the unexpected sound, saw she was half-way to the door and guessed what had happened. He was upon her before she reached the threshold.

She fought until he imprisoned her arms.

"You—you murderer! My father and Paul Marsh! Oh, you monster!" she gasped, still struggling.

He held her close, smiling almost gently as he answered:

"So you saw what I was writing? My confession, I suppose it can be called. Well, it is a pity, but I'm afraid the knowledge will do you little good. You see, Ann, I have decided my kingdom must have a queen. And what could be more proper than the woman I love should be that queen?"

"You're mad!" she gasped straining away from him. Her breasts heaved wildly under the thin fabric of her shirt. The fear that her lips seemed to make them more desirable to Zanger Before she realized his intentions, he had brought his mouth down on hers in a fierce kiss. It was too much for her already over-wrought senses and she fainted.

ANN opened heavy-lidded eyes and stared uncomprehendingly about her. She was still in the laboratory, lying on a table of some sort. Then she remembered what had happened before she had lapsed into unconsciousness. Wildly she started to get up—and discovered she was unable to move. She had been strapped down!

Her slight movement brought Zanger to her side. He was dressed again in his surgeon's gown, this time without the mask. He looked gloatingly at her lovely face for a long moment, then in a voice thick with emotion, said:

"So, my queen has awaked. Soon, my dear, soon you will be mine in fact

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as well as in fancy. But first the mating of the bloods; a necessary adjustment."

His words meant nothing to her. She knew only that he was mad and intended to perform some sort of operation upon her.

There was the sound of a door opening. She turned her head and saw four natives wheel a huge cage into the room. Two of the natives lifted one of the barred sections and the body of a huge lioness dragged out. She could see it was still alive by the pulsations of its heart. Evidently it had been drugged into insensibility.

Zanger wheeled up the other table and the natives hoisted the animal onto it.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Zanger said to Ann. "I had you in mind when we trapped her. She is the queen among her kind, just as you are to be among yours. And now, my dear, don't be afraid. What I'm going to do will be painless, believe me."

She took one look at the hypodermic in his hand and fainted for the second time that night.

CHAPTER VII

THE drop was short and Paul Marsh landed on his feet. Dimly he heard Kruger's horrified, "Paul!" He stood there petrified with fear, expecting fangs and claws of some beast. But nothing happened. The cage was empty. He lifted himself back to the line of planks with trembling hands.

Now they walked even more warily. Twice more Marsh's careful feet disclosed traps and each time he leaped across them with a prayer on his lips. His clothes were wet from perspiration. Each trap was a thing of horror, for he could not know how large the trap doors were, and he had to leap carefully so as to land on the six-inch space which was the zone of safety. It seemed to Marsh that days had gone by since they had left the house. When finally he looked up, there was the fence, no more than ten feet away. The walk ended as it had begun, in a long slope—to the fence. Kruger and M'gabi joined him as he stood silent before the barrier.

"Well, Paul," Kruger said slowly, "looks like we've come from the frying pan to the fire. How're we going to get over that?"

"Don't know," his friend answered wearily. "But we've got to get over it."

He looked back at the house beyond the lines of the cages. It's rambling layout was a dark blot against the blackness of the fading night. His shoulder sagged hopelessly when he turned again to his companions.

A voice came beyond the fence. They looked up, startled. It was a native, naked except for a loin cloth.

"Baas! Baas! No 'fraid fence! Magic gone. Me fix."

They crowded as close to the fence as they dared. Then it was that Marsh recognized the man as the surly Bata whom Zanger had slapped.

"Look, Baas!" the Bata called excitedly. He strode to the fence and shook it. "Me fix. Magic gone," he said again, proudly.

Instantly Marsh knew what had happened: the Bata had shut off the current on the fence. He didn't know however, whether the house lights were on the same circuit. If they were, Zanger would soon find out what had happened.

They wasted little time in scaling the fence. The Bata greeted them with a wide-mouthed grin.

"Look, Baas," he said, and held up two rifles for their inspection. They were their elephant guns.

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Kruger took his and solemnly kissed its walnut stock.

"Now I am a man again!" he exulted. "And now we shall see who is the hunted!"

MARSH wasted no time in asking for explanations, but set off at a run for the house. Beside him, Kruger managed to keep pace with the younger man. The fence swept in a great curve to meet the house. It wasn't long before they passed the servants' quarters at the far wing.

Marsh paused for a bare second at the entrance to the dining room. M'gabi and the Bata ran past him, into the house. He saw the short, heavy bladed spears they carried and knew how murderous such weapons could be at close quarters.

The two white men were just in time to see the brief drama which took place after M'gabi and the other came into the dining room.

A HOWLI servant stepped into the room as the two blacks entered. Before he had time even to yell for help, M'gabi's spear sunk deep into the flesh of his throat.

M'gabi and the Bata stood waiting, their spears held ready, at either side of the door. Marsh crashed his shoulder against the barrier. The lock was a flimsy protective against the sudden explosive shock; the door flew open and they were inside.

Flame and thunder spouted passed Marsh's head during the brief moment required to orient himself. Kruger had but one thought: action, and so his keen eyes saw the four blacks even before Marsh did. He saw, too, the rifles they carried. He shot first, and a black crashed backward, his belly torn open from the terrific force of the huge charge Kruger's gun had thrown into him. Then another, hands futilely clawing at the spear in his chest, fell screaming to the floor.

Again the roar of Kruger's rifle, and this time Marsh went into action. He had seen the strapped body of Ann Nicholls on the table and the body of the lioness on the adjoining table. He saw too, the tube running to the centrifuge, and the container, half-full of blood.

He did not know whether Ann was alive or not. He had only one thought in his mind—to kill! To destroy all this madman's work. Every board, timber, stone, every human had to be destroyed. The heavy rifle in his hand became the voice of his wrath. And each time it spoke, another wall of Zanger's empire came crashing down.

The first shot splintered the glass tube of the centrifuge and sent a crimson flood flowing over the tile floor. The second made useless, forever, the pump. The third mushroomed the skull of the lioness. Then something struck him and he crashed backward to the floor.

Zanger, face purple with maddened rage, had sent the operating table with Ann Nicholls still strapped to it, rolling into Marsh. It was the only thing that saved his life; for Marsh's next shot had been intended for the mad Doctor. Marsh's friends had been too busy with the armed guards to keep watch on the Doctor. Thus is was that, before they could do anything about him, he had slipped through one of the doors.

Zanger alone had managed to escape. Four bodies lay in grotesque attitudes on the floor. Kruger, M'gabi and the Bata had proved their mettle.

Quickly Marsh rose and pawed with fumbling fingers at the binding straps. He had seen the young breasts rise and fall in slow breathing. Ann was alive! His lips framed curses that were prayers of thanksgiving.

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Kruger, seeing how Marsh's shaking hands were fumbling, came to his assistance. The girl opened her eyes as the last strap fell away.

"Paul," she murmured, "I knew you'd come."

He would have taken her in his arms then and there, but Kruger reminded him:

"Not now, Paul. That crazy Doctor's still on the loose."

Marsh wrapped Ann in a sheet and they hurriedly left the charnel room. She kept her eyes averted from the bodies on the floor. M'gabi and the Bata went ahead. Their spears, which they had retrieved, were no longer shiny. Blood crimsoned their once bright heads and dripped to the floor, pointing the way to escape.

THE dawn greeted them, as they stepped outside—dawn and a hail of rifle fire. Smoke and flame billowed from the windows of the servants' wing. Death whistled in the air about them as they ran for the wharf. They could see the power cruiser, bobbing gently in the light flow of the river.

Kruger suddenly grunted savagely, and Marsh paused to ask:

"Hit?"

"Nicked. Wait!"

Kruger turned into the hail of fire and set two shots into one of the windows vomiting flame. A high shrill scream answered the shots. Then he turned and started off again. Marsh saw a flesh wound high on the shoulder line of his friend.

Marsh realized they still had a hundred yards to cover before they reached the boat. The blacks' fire was wild so far, but a single lucky shot could spell disaster. Even as Kruger started off again, Marsh commanded in a tone that brooked no disobedience:

"Get to the boat! I'll cover."

Then he knelt in the dew-wet grass and began to fire, slowly and methodically.

The natives' fire was coming from two windows. He could see their figures, rifle stocks cuddled close to their cheeks. Carefully he took aim and began to fire. Four shots! And four of the figures tumbled backward. Two bullets left. One for each of the two remaining rifle men. He pressed the trigger again and felt the satisfying kick of the rifle against his shoulder. And then a bolt of searing, tearing fire struck him, knocking him flat.

He felt a wetness along his side and knew that it was his life's blood. The shock passed. The pain was yet to come. But so great was his will to live, that he was able to get to his knee and lift the rifle to his shoulder again.

His eyes, weary and red from pain and cordite fumes, saw who had fired the shot that felled him. A tall, thin Bata stood in the doorway of a little chamber which served as a store-room. The black sighted along his rifle barrel . . . and once again thunder and smoke rippled past Marsh's shoulder.

Kruger had disobeyed. He had come back!

The black in the doorway swung drunkenly for a second, then toppled forward to lay with kicking legs in the blood-reddened dust. Another figure appeared in the doorway and Kruger shot again—and missed! For a second the figure was outlined against the white background of the house. Then in the next instant there came a great sheet of flame and an earth-shaking explosion. The entire house seemed to lift up, then settle back with a thud. But now golden bright flames leaped from every window.

"God!" Kruger whispered, as he bent to help Marsh. "I must have hit the powder barrel."

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"Gas," Marsh gasped, "Storeroom—f o r—g a s. G e t—t o—boat, quick! Animals are loose."

Kruger knew what Marsh meant. The beasts had been set free from their cages by the blast, and in a few seconds they would come to seek their prey.

Quickly they came to the two blacks and Ann, who had stopped running when they saw Kruger return to the wounded Marsh.

Just ahead of them, past a row of azaleas, was the wharf. M'gabi placed his arm around Marsh, and, with the two men supporting him, he managed to keep pace with the others.

The Bata was the first to reach the path which led between the palm-like trees. Suddenly he turned back toward them.

Coming forward to meet them was a figure that brought a scream from Ann.

IT WAS Zanger. But was it? The figure was dressed like the Doctor and gave voice to that deep laugh of his. But there the resemblance ended. For emerging from the clothes was the head of a lion, mouth spread in a horrible snarl. Furry paws, claws sheathed, hung from the arms of the white jacket. And from that distended inhuman, mouth words came:

"So we meet again, eh, Marsh? Don't you recognize me—Zanger? Not like this, eh?" He had been moving slowly forward as he talked.

The Bata, petrified with fear, stood stock-still directly in his path. Zanger struck him. It was so quickly done that none saw the blow, only the effect. The Bata reeled backward, his mouth opened in a scream, but no sound came out.

Kruger gulped in horror when he saw what the claws had done. They had ripped downward from throat to abdomen, ribboning the flesh and tearing a great wound in the belly from which the grayish-red intestines began to protrude. The black lay on the ground, his fingers helplessly trying to press the gaping wound together.

Zanger continued to come forward. He passed Ann as though she were invisible. His eyes held only Marsh in their focus. Ten feet seperated them! Five! And then M'gabi hurled his spear! The haft stuck straight from Zanger's chest; the blade rested deep within. Yet, he continued to advance in spite of the wound.

Ages passed during his progress. Kruger saw Marsh raise his rifle. And with that motion, Zanger leaped forward!

Paul Marsh squeezed convulsively at the trigger. And nothing happened. The gun was empty. Kruger threw himself forward to save Marsh. It was too late to shoot. But he tried to use his rifle as a club. Zanger brushed it aside as if it were a straw. The blow sent Kruger spinning. And death leaped forward to embrace Paul Marsh.

He caught the hot, fetid odor of the animal's breath . . . saliva dripped down on his upturned face . . . tendons of steel gripped him; he went down under the huge weight. His head struck against the ground and consciousness left him in a blinding flash of pain.

"DARLING, darling, o p e n your eyes!"

Paul Marsh did as he was bid. His head was cradled in Ann Nicholls' arms. Kruger and M'gabi knelt at his side. He sat up and pain made his stomach turn. Zanger, no longer an animal, lay a few feet away. He looked oddly at peace. The wide blade of a spear protruded from his throat just below his chin, his head seeming to rest on it.

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"Ann," Kruger said in answer to the unspoken question. "She picked up the Bata's spear and got Zanger just as that lion-man got you."

"He doesn't resemble a lion now," Marsh said, mystified.

Kruger shrugged his shoulders.

"We dragged him off you. When we looked at him—well, there he is."

Marsh arose painfully, Ann's arms still around him. Her eyes were clear and unafraid.

"So you know," he said.

"About Dad? Yes, I saw in Zanger's ledger his paranoic confession."

They sat side by side in the boat. Behind them was the still blazing house. Mingled with the crackling sound of blazing timber came the pain-filled roars of trapped animals.

Ahead of them lay Molubi—and peace.

Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Stokes

This physicist told us most of what we know of the motions of waves through various types of media

SIR GEORGE GABRIEL STOKES, British mathematician and physicist, son of the rector of Skreen, Co. Sligo, Ireland, was born on August 13, 1819. In 1837 he entered Pembroke college, Cambridge, where he became a fellow in 1841. He lost his fellowship when he married in 1857, but twelve years later, under new statutes, he was re-elected. In 1902, he was elected Master. As Lucasian professor, secretary and president of the Royal Society, he held three offices, which had only once before been held by one man, Sir Isaac Newton. He was member of parliament for the University from 1887 to 1892, was created baronet in 1889 and died on February 1, 1903.

Stokes was the oldest of the trio of physicists, Clerk Maxwell and Lord Kelvin being the other two, who especially contributed to the fame of the Cambridge school of mathematical physics in the middle of the 19th century. The Royal Society's catalogue of scientific papers gives the titles of over a hundred memoirs by him published down to 1883. The greater part of his work was concerned with waves and the transformations imposed on them during their passage through various media.

His first published papers, which appeared in 1842 and 1843, were on the steady motion of incompressible fluids and some cases of fluid motion; these were followed in 1845 by one on the friction of fluids in motion and the equilibrium and motion of elastic solids, and in 1850 by another on the effects of the internal friction of fluids on the motion of pendulums.

To the theory of sound he made several contributions, including a discussion of the effect of wind on the intensity of sound and an explanation of how the intensity is influenced by the nature of the gas in which the sound is produced. These inquiries together put the science of hydrodynamics on a new footing, and provided a key not only to the explanation of many natural phenomena, such as the suspension of clouds in air, and the subsidence of ripples and waves in water, but also to the solution of practical problems, such as the flow of water in rivers and channels, and the skin resistance of ships.

Stokes was the first to explain the basic principles upon which the science of spectroscopy rests, namely, that absorption spectra and emission spectra are identical—a principle afterwards rediscovered by Kirchhoff. His best known researches are perhaps those on the undulatory theory of light. His first papers on the aberration of light appeared in 1845 and 1846, and were followed in 1848 by one on the theory of certain bands seen in the spectrum. In 1849 his paper on the dynami-

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cal theory of diffraction showed that the plane of polarization must be perpendicular to the direction of vibration. Two years later he discussed the colors of thick plates; and in 1852, in his famous paper on the change of refrangibility of light, he described the phenomenon of fluorescence. Up to this time practically nothing was known about fluorescence and this was one of his great discoveries. His explanation may be stated as follows:

All varieties of matter, when subjected to the action of a beam of sunlight, experience more or less of a rise in temperature. Some few are capable of absorbing the light rays almost as fast as they arrive, and exhibit mainly the transfer of that form of energy into motion; as, for instance, water, which, under the action of light, will show a slight increase of temperature it is true, but the principal effect is the change of some of it into the condition of a vapor, and the elevation of this into the air (evaporation). Other substances, as most solids, are unable to absorb light as rapidly as it reaches them. Some of these have the power to reflect part, and radiate the balance in the form of heat. Still another class possesses the ability of absorbing the violet and ultra-violet rays, without experiencing much of a rise of temperature, and then of returning the energy so absorbed in the shape of longer and visible rays of green, yellow and even pink. The mineral fluorspar possesses this power preeminently, and also certain liquids such as quinine sulphate. This is the phenomenon called fluorescence. It is exhibited to a greater or less extent by a number of other familiar substances, ivory, dry bone, glass colored by uranium oxide, and some varieties of paper.

Most of these fluorescent substances cease to emit light as soon as the incident ray is cut off. Others, and notably barium, strontium and calcium sulphides, diamonds, sulphur, sugar and many forms of animal life, retain the power for some time afterwards. The phenomenon is then known as phosphorescence, but has nothing whatever to do with phosphorus.

Stokes' explanation has been abundantly demonstrated, and is known as Stokes' law, which, in brief is: "That fluorescent light is of a longer wavelength than that of the absorbed waves from which it is produced."

One of the results flowing from this discovery, is that a certain length of the ultra violet and invisible part of the solar spectrum, can be made visible, by throwing those rays upon a screen moistened with some fluorescent substance, which will then return them in the shape of rays of longer wavelength, which produce in the eye the color effects we call green, yellow, and pink.

A mechanical model, illustrating the dynamical principle of Stokes' explanation was shown in 1883, during a lecture at the Royal Institution, by Lord Kelvin, who said he had heard an account of it from Stokes many years before, and had repeatedly but vainly begged him to publish it. In the same year, 1852, there appeared the paper on the composition and resolution of streams of polarized light from different sources, and in 1853 an investigation of the metallic reflection exhibited by certain non-metallic substances. About 1860 he was engaged in an inquiry on the intensity of light reflected from, or transmitted through, a pile of plates; and in 1862 he prepared for the British Association a valuable report on double refraction, which marks a period in the history of the subject in England. A paper on the long spectrum of the electric light bears the same date, and was followed by an inquiry into the absorption spectrum of blood.

The discrimination of organic bodies by their optical properties was treated in 1864; and later, in conjunction with the Rev. W. Vernon Harcourt, he investigated the relation between the chemical constitution and the optical properties of various glasses, with reference to the conditions of transparency and the improvement of achromatic telescopes. A still later paper connected with the construction of optical instruments discussed the theoretical limits to the aperture of microscopical objectives.

In other departments of physics may be mentioned his paper on the conduction of heat in crystals and his inquiries in connection with the radiometer; his explanation of the light border frequently noticed in photographs just outside the outline of a dark body seen against the sky; and still later, his theory of the Röntgen rays, which he suggested might be transverse waves traveling as innumerable solitary waves, not in regular trains. Two long papers published in 1849, one on attractions and Clairaut's theorem, and the other on the variation of gravity at the surface of the earth, also demand notice, as do his mathematical memoirs on the critical values of the sums of periodic series and on the numerical calculation of a class of definite integrals and infinite series and his valuable discussion of a differential equation relating to the strains, stresses, and other factors involved in the breaking of railway bridges.

Many of Stokes' discoveries were only touched upon in lectures. As Lucasian profressor, he announced that he wished to help any member of the university in his mathematical studies, and pupils were glad to consult him, even after they had become colleagues. During the thirty years of his secretaryship to the Royal Society he advanced the cause of mathematical and physical science, not only by his own investigations, but by suggesting problems for inquiry and inciting men to attack them.

He received the Rumford medal in 1852 and in 1893, the Copley medal. His numerous other honors included the Prussian Ordre pour le Merite. In 1869 he presided over the Exeter meeting of the British Association.

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WHAT'S NEW?

Three men vanish, are replaced by two babies and a monkey. What does it mean?

NOW, now, Mother!"

The words were spoken in mild rebuke but there was a twinkle in the blue eyes of the man who uttered them. His majestic figure was clothed in a plaid Norfolk jacket and wool breeches. A plaid cap surmounted the wealth of snow white hair on his head. His ruddy cheeks bloomed with health and well-being and he strode along the mountain trail with long, resolute steps.

The woman, too, was dressed for the weather and the scene. She looked like a fit mate for her majestic-appearing companion. Just now, however, her usually mild calm eyes were flashing sparks of anger and the soft lovely lips were set in the stern lines of disapproval.

"Well, I can't help it," she said, continuing what was evidently an argument. "These people who come here, seeking 'nature in the raw' as they call it, and desecrating with their dirt the clean forest and streams. And these hunters! With their guns and their dogs! But worst of all——"

"You mustn't get so worked up, my dear," the man remonstrated.

"—are these idiots who come here and beat their breasts and shout, 'This is what I need! This'll make a new man of me!' And then proceed to carouse at some resort!"

"Now, mother," the white-haired

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By E. E. PELLETIER

They drew back in alarm at sight of the wildly cavorting monkey and the two guns in its paws

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man broke in again. "What can we do? After all, they're only human."

"Yes, I know" she said impatiently. "But we've come here for peace and rest. And there is none to be had here! There was before, wasn't there? But now more and more of them come here. Do you know what I'm . . ."

"No! I won't have it!" he said sternly. The twinkle had disappeared from his eyes. "Do you understand? It is no longer our affair."

She regarded him with a sidelong, secretive look. Her lips spread in a gay smile.

"Of course, my dear," she said soothingly. "You are right. It is none of our business."

But there was that in her eyes which said otherwise.

THE tall, dark-faced man pointed to a tiny spot on the map.

"Here, you see," he said to the other three gathered around the desk, "is the lake. Almost entirely surrounded by these mountains."

"Yes, we see," said a slender, fair-skinned, fair-haired man dressed in dinner clothes, "but tell me, Mavis, what's the purpose of such an unusual meeting place?"

Mavis turned and walked over to the window and looked down at the lighted squares of Manhattan, forty stories below. His eyes were narrowed in a look of hate. He turned and walked back to the desk, and he was smiling now.

"You see all that region?" he said, "It is considered one of the finest big-game regions in the country. And what would be more natural than for William Mavis, the big-game hunter, to try for some of the famous bear and deer to be found there?"

"Yes, yes," said the fair-haired one, "you told us that before. But why this —this isolated, inaccessible region?"

"You fool!" Mavis burst out. "Can't you see? This spot I have pointed out is only sixty miles from New York City. We must make certain that complete secrecy is maintained. This is our last job. The F.B.I. has come too close in their efforts to trap us. Last week it was Mueller and his men. I told him not to use the Jersey City terminal! But would he listen? You and the government agents know the answer."

"Mavis, we know what happened. But how are you going to contact our agents in Canada?"

"That has already been done. A small hydroplane will land on this little land-locked lake on a certain day. Aboard will be the necessary explosives. Now, Dortmann, listen closely! I am going there for the purpose of game hunting. Well that *is* what I am going to do! Shoot deer and bear." He suddenly burst into hoarse laughter. "How simple! Yet how effective. Who would think of looking into the carcasses of a deer and a bear for concentrated explosives."

Dortmann's eyes were wide in astonishment.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed softly, admiringly. "As you say, it is so simple. But clever! I am quite sure that not even the F.B.I. would ever suspect that William Mavis, sportsman, clubman and scion of one of New York's oldest families, is a German agent."

"Not *an* agent," Mavis' harsh voice reminded him, "*The* agent. For was it not into *my* hands that this, our supreme sabotage effort, was entrusted?"

The other two, who had been silent all this time, suddenly broke into guttural agreement. Neither Mavis nor Dortmann paid any attention to them. It was obvious they were only minor subordinates.

Dortmann, who had been in an obvious state of tense nerves, now relaxed.

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He sat down in one of the desk chairs, pulled an expensive cigarette case from his pocket and lit one of the cigarettes.

"When do you expect the plane?"

"It shall be there Thursday. It should not take more than three days of hunting to bag my limit. He will fly over this lake every day from Monday through the week. I am bringing a rocket flare along for signaling purposes."

DORTMANN nodded his head in satisfaction. His voice held admiration when he asked:

"How did you think of this?"

Mavis glowed with egotistic satisfaction.

"Here, read this," he said, pulling a newspaper advertisement from his jacket pocket.

Dortmann took it and read aloud:

"Are you one of those who read patent-medicine advertisements and then ask yourself: 'Am I run-down, irritable, nervous?' and immediately run down to the druggist for whatever palliative is offered? If you are, then stop right here. This is not intended for you. But if your symptoms are such as I have described, then I can make a new man out of you."

Dortmann stopped reading. A puzzled frown wrinkled his forehead.

"What is this you have given me?" he asked in exasperation, "What has this laxative or bromide, or whatever it advocates to do with your plan?"

Mavis' answer held weary sarcasm:

"Why don't you read the entire thing? It is just like you, Dortmann, to leap to an unwarranted conclusion before you have the facts. Read it all, man!"

"Very well, I suppose you know what you're doing," Dortmann returned, as he picked up the ad again. He resumed reading aloud:

"Yes, men, I mean just that! You will forget your cares and worries. This is not a patent-medicine advertisement. On the contrary, I offer no cure except Nature's own. The clean fresh air, the green forest, the mountain stream. If you are interested, contact Harry Horton, Room 707 Cornerstone Building, this city."

"Sounds like one of those 'nature quacks,' doesn't it?" Mavis said. "Well, I read that piece and forgot it. Why I went back to it, I don't know—but I did. What's more, I contacted this Horton.

"He's an advertising promotion man. One of these 'hale and hearty' boys, you know; vacations six months a year. I asked about this ad, and here's what he told me. He was up in the Adirondacks, hunting game, and he saw this place. He was so struck by the tranquillity of it and so on, *ad nauseum*, that he decided to let other people know about it. Funny thing about it is, I believe he's sincere. Anyway, there are cabins and guides to be had. According to Horton, it's a wild sort of country, and he showed photographs to prove it.

"Well, there was where the idea was born. When I saw a photograph of this mountain-locked lake, I knew how we were going to get those explosives."

Dortman had been showing signs of excitement while listening to Mavis' story. Cracking his knuckles for the last time, he leaped from his chair and grabbing the other's hand, shook it enthusiastically.

"Now I understand," he said in a voice brittle with excitement. "Who

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would suspect the hunter, seeking the little-traveled, inaccessible places for his game? Yes, I can see it all. The pilot drops the explosives by parachute and you row out to retrieve it. Right?"

"Right, Dortmann! . . . And now you had better leave. I will contact you when I return. Until then, do nothing. Understand?"

It was an order. Dortmann understood.

RAYMOND Milburn Holburn looked down at the girl on the sofa. She was lost in the pages of a magazine at that moment and so could not see his eyes soften and his features lose that look of stern aloofness that was a part of his character. She would have been surprised, for it wasn't often that he looked that way.

"How odd," he thought, as he regarded the bright halo of her hair and noticed the fine lines of her forehead, nose and chin, "that this child, this barely grown woman, has done to me what no other person has ever done. And so unconsciously. So matter of factly."

His hand made an unconscious gesture toward her head, as though he intended to stroke it. Then he walked around and, seating himself beside her, took the magazine from her hands. She looked at him with bright surprise.

"Well," she said, a dimple showing in one cheek, "I like that! Just when the hero is about to get the girl! Couldn't you have waited?" But the smile in her eyes and lips showed it was only mock anger.

"That, my dear, is inevitable. The hero will get the girl and they will live happily ever after—in the magazine." The irony in his voice held her motionless. It was as though she knew he was going to say something which would effect her future.

He took her hands between his and looked into her eyes for a long second. A smile, oddly pensive for so strong a mouth, lighted his face.

"Penny," he began, "you love my brother Tom very much, don't you?" Her eyes gave the answer. "Yes, I see you do. Nor do I blame you. He has told me of his love for you, also." He sighed and continued; "As you know, Tom has no money of his own. Nor will he have any other than what he makes from his music, until I die. Then my fortune passes into his hands."

The easy flow of words came to an abrupt halt. He suddenly began to stammer. A slow flush crept up his face.

"Penny, my dear! Please listen. I —uh—how odd that—I thought it would be——"

"Ray!" Her voice was sharp with annoyance. "What are you trying to to say?"

"I love you," came the answer.

"Oh no! Ray! You musn't say that!"

"Why? Is it wrong for me to love?"

She drew her hands from his and stood up. For a moment she walked back and forth before him. He could see that his words had affected her strongly, for her face was pale and as she walked, she kept clasping and unclasping her hands. Finally she stopped and faced him. There was great pity in her eyes but her lips gave only censure.

"That was very unfair of you! Throwing in Tom's poverty. And, at the same time, reminding me of your benevolence to—us."

He started to interrupt but she stopped him with a gesture.

"Yes, I know that Tom's brother is considered to be one of the financial giants. I know he controls the lives and destinies of thousands. And I also know that he can control, even

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destroy, our lives."

HE LOOKED at her in amazement. This girl, this frail, glorious slip of a girl, was superb. His love almost burst its bounds. But he held his silence until she was through.

Her voice condemned him utterly:

"Yes, you paid for Tom's concerts. I know that. And because of your power you can make of his career a smooth, easy moving path to success, or see to it that he becomes an abject failure. Shall I tell you something then? That I would rather have him with all his weakness, than you with all your strength and power!" The last was said on a rising note of hysteria.

He was again his iron-willed self.

"Sit down!" he commanded. "You are a little premature with your assumptions. I did not say that I would do as you imagine. But you were right. I can do just that. And more! I can even make him *hate* you. Did you think of that?"

Her eyes went wide in horror.

"Oh no!" she whispered pleadingly.

"Yes," he continued, "it would be a simple matter. Merely voice my displeasure at his choice, then remind him constantly that I could have done so much for him had he married some one else. And as his efforts to succeed turn to failure, so will his love turn to hatred. For he will see only pity in your eyes and feel only sorrow in your heart. He will become twisted mentally and morally. Soon he——"

"Stop!" Her voice rang loudly in the small room. "So you love me, do you? It isn't love you feel; its desire! Desire for something which is beyond your reach: like a precious painting or piece of statuary. But, unlike the painting, I cannot be bought. I have no price nor have you wealth enough to offer! Very well. You have told me what would happen to us. Now I can tell *you* what would happen to you. I would remind you in every waking hour and come to you in every sleeping one, to tell you that I was his. His! And that no matter what happened, I would *always* be his. I don't think you would like that, do you?"

He realized then that he had made a bad job of it. He had come to her to plead his love, and when he came into the room, he had every intention of accepting her decision, whatever it was. But with her first startled, horror-stricken exclamation, the arrogance and pride which was such a great part of his make-up put other words in his mouth. Words which he knew would hurt. Nor could he stop now. The die was cast.

"I am quite prepared," he said calmly, as he stood up and took his hat from the gate-leg table near the door, "to pay that price. I want you! And I *shall* have you. You will not stand for long to see the ruin of Tom's life. Your love for him, for the music which is in his soul, is too great. Remember this, though. I have been known to lose my desire for things as quickly as I have acquired that same desire."

She sat silently, eyes intent on something in her lap. She did not look up when he finished. Nor did she know he had left the room. She saw only the broken dream in her lap.

HOLBURN stood on the curbing before the apartment building in which she lived and searched the street for a cab.

"The Cornerstone Building, in Manhattan," he directed the driver, when a cab pulled up.

. . . . Holburn paused before a frosted-pane door and read the legend on it. H. HORTON, ADVERTISING PROMOTIONS.

A bright young thing in blouse, skirt

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and bobby socks sat before a typewriter in the small reception room on which the outer door opened.

"Yase?" Her voice was an odd imitation of that of some movie actress. Or perhaps it was the gum in her cheek.

Holburn gave her his card. She read it and asked:

"Have you an appointment with Mr. Horton?"

"No," Holburn replied, "Just give him the card. And say it's about the advertisement."

"Oh, yase sire," she said, as she disappeared through a door which Holburn surmised led to Horton's private office.

She returned in a few seconds. "Go right in, Mr. Holburn," she said, almost curtsying in awe. Horton had evidently recognized the name and had told her of Holburn's importance. "Mr. Horton's not busy now."

Holburn nodded his thanks and stepped into Horton's private office. He was struck by the number of photographs of outdoor life adorning the walls. He understood their presence when he looked closely at the advertising man. There was something about the red-cheeked, jovial-faced man, something about the clear eyes, that told of his love for the outdoors. But Holburn didn't waste any time in mental speculation on Horton's regard for Nature. He pulled a paper from his pocket and placed it on the desk.

"Is that yours?"

Horton studied the man before him intently. It was natural for him to wonder why this man, who was such a great financial power, should be interested in his advertizement.

"Yes. Won't you sit down, Mr. Holburn?"

Holburn sat down and placed his hat on Horton's desk.

Horton said: "Why are *you* interested in this? Obviously, you can go where you will, do you want. Permit me a small curiosity?"

Holburn smiled. He lit a cigarette, settled himself comfortably in the chair and said:

"Of course, Horton. You *are* entitled to some curiosity and I will satisfy it. Frankly, your ad intrigued me. I have been all over this world and have yet to find a place that offers peace, tranquility, and the promise to feel like a new man. Well, Horton, I must confess that you caught me at the proper moment.

"The press of business and the responsibilities of my life have placed a serious drain on my nerves. I need a rest, badly! And just now a series of lucky circumstances enables me to get away for a month or so. But I must know of this 'Elysian Field.'"

Horton's candid gray eyes crinkled at the corners in delight. It was apparent that he loved to boast of his discovery.

"It happened like this," he began. "As you have noticed, my hobby is photography. I take a six-month vacation every year to indulge in that hobby. This year, I went to the Adirondacks." He stood up and walked to the far wall. Removing three of the photographs which hung there, he put them on the desk for Holburn's inspection.

Holburn studied the photographs closely. He had seen such scenes before. This picture showed a mountain-locked lake; this one, an unusual shot of a deer drinking at a mountain stream; and this one, a panorama of forest-clad mountain country.

There was a question in his eyes when he looked up. Horton answered the question:

"I know. You have seen more breath-taking scenes. These pictures cannot bring to you the sense of peace and well-

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being that you will find there. Believe me, Holburn, I was content just to browse around the mountain side or sit by the shore of that small lake. I tell you I felt like a new man after being there for only a few weeks."

Holburn believed him. Nor did he ask any further questions, except for location and cabin facilities. After Horton told him what to expect, Holburn said:

"Should this come up to expectations, Horton, I have a plan in mind that will benefit you greatly. I mean in a financial way. However that can wait until my return. Well sir," he concluded as he got up and started for the door, "you have made a sale. At least, you've sold me. If, as I said before, it proves beneficial, I have an idea about this mountain retreat."

THE happy grin that had appeared on Horton's face remained after Holburn left. Remained until he happened to turn over the newspaper page in which his ad appeared. The bold type of a column heading, made him assume a more sober and thoughtful look. Hurriedly he scanned through the item.

Mavis Mystery Deepens

Members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Dean county police have been presented with a puzzling problem during the past few days.

The problem concerns itself with the remains of a small hydroplane found washed up on the western shore of Lake Acotchee; the clothing of William Mavis, socialite sportsman of this city; and a naked, year-old infant, in perfect health, found in the woods nearby.

When the F.B.I. captured members of a sabotage ring headed by Gustave Dortmann, Dortmann made a complete confession. That confession implicated William Mavis as the ringleader of the group. The whereabouts of Mavis was a mystery until one of the minor members of the ring pointed out Mavis' hiding place on the map. This proved to be Lake Acotchee, a small lake located in the mountain fastness of the wildest part of the Adirondacks, in Dean County. Further questioning brought out the reason for Mavis' choosing this out-of-the-way spot for a hiding place. A plane was to make rendezvous with him and drop explosives for use in the ring's sabotage plans.

Did William Mavis commit suicide in the depths of Lake Acotchee? Or was the abandoned plane a ruse to throw off pursuit? Those are the complex questions for which the government men seek answers.

The Dean County police problem may be simpler. Who brought an infant to that wilderness and left him there?

"William Mavis," Horton mused. "Of course! He was here just last week!"

MONK CORDONI backed slowly out the door of the Lido Club. A figure showed for the barest instant in the entrance way. The heavy automatic swinging at the end of one of Monk's long arms barked loudly once and the figure disappeared.

A low-slung, powerful roadster moved slowly along the curb. When it reached the parking space in front of the Lido Club, Monk pivoted about and leaped through the open door of the car. The roadster broke into a low muffled roar and sped away as frightened faces made an appearance in the club entrance.

The driver spoke out of his tightly held lips while his eyes stared straight ahead.

"Was he there?"

Cordoni put the gun in the waistband of his trousers and buttoned the vest over it.

"Yeah," he answered. "And he's still there. But he ain't talking any more."

"Hnh huh. About time you shut him up."

"Yeah."

The car drove through the deserted

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streets at breakneck speed. The two men sat silent, taut-nerved, listening to the radio.

"Calling all cars! Be on lookout for blue Cadillac convertible roadster, license number——"

"Damn it! We were seen!" the driver swore.

"Shut up," Gordoni whispered. "I wanta get the rest of this."

"—was shot to death by Monk Cordoni. Driver of car believed to be 'Stiff' Morton. Both men wanted dead or alive."

Cordoni's red-rimmed eyes narrowed in somber thought and his thick lips grimaced in a caricature of a grin.

"This is the blow-off, Stiff," he said.

"Yeah . . . to the joint?"

Cordoni nodded.

A police sedan suddenly shot out of a side street, almost ramming the speeding car.

"The heat!" Stiff grunted savagely, twisting the wheel over furiously. They barely avoided a collision. Stiff pressed hard at the accelerator, driving it to the floor. The police car, siren shrilling, drove hard in pursuit.

The radio in Cordoni's car became alive again:

"District Car 41 on blue cadillac—calling cars, 60, 62, 80—coming down Fortieth on——" There was a sudden crashing series of sounds and the police radio went silent.

Smoke curled softly from the barrel of Cardoni's automatic. The red-rimmed eyes looked banefully through the rear window at the police car. He could see the driver, slumped across the wheel.

The police car began a weird, rocking dance. Even as Cordoni commanded, "Brakes, Stiff," he saw the rear of the pursuing car slew about and then it had plunged over the curbing into the wall of a building. It teetered back and forth for a few seconds, then slowly turned over on its side.

"Double back," Cordoni barked at Stiff, "and use the Causeway. They won't think of that."

Stiff had braked down to a whining, groaning stop. He whirled the car around in the street and sped back along the same route. As they passed the overturned Police car, Cordoni calmly and callously emptied his gun into it.

IT WAS a shabby street, lined with warehouses and pockmarked by an occasional frame shack. Stiff drove the car into an areaway between two darkened warehouses. They got out and walked into one of the warehouses and up to the second floor.

Cordoni walked over to a small closet in the room they had entered. From one of the cupboards it contained, he took an automatic, the mate to the one in his waistband, and half a dozen clips of ammunition.

Stiff sat down at the small bare table the room boasted. A cigarette drooped limply from his lips. Cordoni brought back a half filled whiskey bottle and two water glasses. Pouring a generous measure into each glass, he set them down on the table.

"Well, Stiff," he said, sitting down across from the other, "it looks like it's time to take a last duck."

He swallowed the contents of the glass in a single gulp. Stiff regarded him with a passive, stiff-faced look.

"Yep," Cordoni continued, "it looks like public enemy number one is going to take a last powder."

"Yeah? How? Where?" the other asked.

"Here, read this!" Cordoni commanded as he pulled two torn pieces of newspaper from his jacket pocket.

A puzzled frown appeared on Stiff's

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forehead as he read through the articles Cordoni indicated.

"So," he said at last, "what's this got to do with us?"

"Well, what do they say?"

"This one—" Stiff shook one of the pages— "says some Heinie knocked hisself off in this Lake Acotchee. And the other one says that this big shot, Holburn, did the same thing. At least, that's what they think, 'cause they found their clothes by the lake. And that's all."

"No, Stiff," Cordoni said smiling, "that ain't all! Y'see, you missed the most important part."

"Huh?"

"Sure, stupe—about those kids. The German disappears and a naked kid is found in the woods. Holburn disappears and again a kid is found. How come they never found any kids there before or after?"

"Search me."

"I'll tell you what I think. And don't tell me I'm nuts, because I'm stakin' my life on it. I think those kids are Mavis and Holburn. What happened to change them—" Cordoni shrugged thick shoulders— "don't ask me, I don't know. But that's what I think took place. Now I'm no jerk, Stiff. Sooner or later they're going to get me. So I'm going to disappear and another kid is going to be found in those woods."

Stiff looked as though he thought Monk had suddenly lost his mind.

"Okay, boss," he said in awestruck accents "but how're you going to duck the cops?"

Cordoni smiled widely. He poured another shot in the glass and drank it before he answered.

"Remember that salvage stock I bought? And that trailer truck? Well, I got that truck full of that junk down at the terminal. Tonight I'm driving that truck past all the cops in New York and out to that lake."

He got up and walked back to the closet. He held a grease-stained cap, bearing a union button, a heavy leather jacket and a pair of dark work-pants in his hands when he came back to the table.

"Get it," he said. "I'm just the driver, taking the load out. Who'd suspect me?"

"Gee, boss," Stiff chortled in admiration, "what a brain. The cops'll never smarten up."

Cordoni grinned as he changed his clothes.

"How do I look?" he asked, settling the cap firmly on his dark hair.

"Perfect! Where's my stuff? They'll never grab us."

Cordoni picked up the clips and automatics from the table and smiled down at the other. There was something strange, something horrible, in the smile.

"S'matter boss?"

"Us?"

"Sure. Ain't I go— *Boss!*" Stiff suddenly understood. The smile! The automatic pointing its ugly snout at his forehead!

"Us?" Cordoni repeated softly. "Just me, Stiff," and pulled the trigger.

The sound of the shot reverberated from the walls, echoing and re-echoing hollowly. Stiff's entire body jerked back from the force of the slug which tore through his forehead and down out the back of his neck. Then it slumped forward across the table; the right hand, with its index finger pointing accusingly, lay flat on the two pieces of newspaper. Cordoni's face still wore that smile as, without even a backward glance, he walked through the door.

SPECIAL AGENT DENNY cracked his knuckles loudly. The others in the dingy room recognized the sound

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as the voice of his displeasure.

"Damn it!" Denny snapped out. "Where the hell could he have gone to? We've got every bridge leading out of Manhattan posted. Doc says this guy's only been dead a matter of two or three hours. Cordoni's clothes are here but where is Cordoni?"

Again he walked over to the body of Stiff Morton. It was the third time he had done that in the past fifteen minutes. It was as though he expected to find his answer in the dead body of the gangster.

He looked at the bullet-torn head; the torso bent over the table; the extended hand with its pointing finger—and saw what the finger pointed to!

"Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed softly. "Look," he said. "Look where Morton's finger is pointing."

The other agents gathered around the table to see what Denny was pointing to.

"Lake Acotchee! Morton's dead hand is telling us where to go. That's why those pages are on the table. Let's go, boys; Cordoni's only got a few hours start on us."

MONK CORDONI shivered, wondering whether it was the early morning chill or that feeling of dread that was responsible. Lake Acotchee was two miles up the steep grade ahead of him, as the native who gave him directions had said, "ye'll hev to walk then. Old loggin' road leadin' off the highway; hef mile o' swamp an' gully—but with it. Purtiest lek in these parts."

It was a tough steep pull but the old engine of Monk's truck proved tougher. And there it was, just as the guide had said. A gray mist hung knee high over the thick wet grass. An odor, wet and smelling of rank, dying things, came up to meet him as he started down the rut which was once a logging road. Swamp grass and creepers, dying with the first cold breath of winter, made crackling sounds against the rough cloth of his pants. A wind stirred and rubbed chill fingers over Monk's face. Again he shivered but this time he knew why. It wasn't from cold.

The matted hair of his chest was dripping perspiration, his hands were clammy with it and his face was wet from it. The road led down through the V of a narrow gully. It took unexpected dips and turns. Monk would trip now and then and go sprawling, then pick himself up from the tangle of roots and vines and go plunging forward again. Each time he got to his feet, he would mumble:

"I got to get there! Now I know I was right. It'll be worth it. Better than that hot seat. They can't give that to a baby!"

At last he was through the swamp and the woods and out on the shore of Lake Acotchee. It wasn't a large lake—perhaps a mile and a half long. But it was beautiful. The dark green of mountain fir and pine gave it a picturesque and lovely setting. Monk started to move forward and felt himself in the grip of some gigantic force. The wind was now a solid wall of air which seemed to hold him immovable while invisible fingers beat at his brain.

His clothes were a vise from which he had to escape. He ripped and tore at them in a mad frenzy. Pain, merciless and insistent, forged torturing bands around his brain. He began to scream and laugh. The lake, the woods, the mountains, the sky—all were part of a kaleidescopic whirl of which he was the center. He began to chatter meaningless inhuman sounds that drooled from his lips like foul saliva.

SPECIAL AGENT DENNY crawled through the tangle of brush. Behind

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him were half a dozen of his men. Gone was the nattiness that was his mark of distinction. Slime had fouled his business suit; there were gaping tears in the cloth where thorns and spiked branches had taken their toll. Sweat ran down his face, making streaky channels in the dust-encrusted skin.

He and his men had been on this hellish road for an hour now. He was beginning to wonder if they had not been given the wrong directions.

"God! What a place!" he exclaimed as he paused to catch his breath. He pulled a sodden handkerchief from his pocket and made futile dabbing pokes at his face. It only spread the streaks. His men joined him. Two carried submachine guns; the rest, like Denny, were armed with regulation pistols. They looked tired and worn.

"Where'd that wind come from?" Denny asked. "It just came up and beat at us for a few minutes, then stopped blowing."

No one knew.

Denny sighed and plunged forward again. And suddenly they were in the open. The sparkling waters of Lake Acotchee glinted brightly in the fall sunshine.

"Down, men," Denny said in warning as he dropped to the ground. The rest followed.

. . . An amazed, "Well, I'll be damned!" broke from Denny's lips. He got up and started slowly forward. His men followed in a tight semi-circle, guns held at the ready. But there was no need for guns. This section of Lake Acotchee was deserted except for a small pile of men's clothes and a monkey. The monkey was hopping up and down, chattering shrilly in rage. He held an automatic pistol in each of his tiny hands.

Two of the men captured the screaming animal. The rest bent down to examine the clothing lying there. One of the men said:

"These are Cordoni's clothes, according to the description we got. But where is he?"

"Yeah," said another, "and how'd that monk get here? Who gave it the guns?"

Denny shook his head in bewilderment. He felt certain this was a puzzle that would not be answered quickly.

"I don't know," he said. "Well, pick up all this stuff and the monk and let's head back. If he escaped, we'll pick up his trail later. They say that water's kind of cold and it's a long way across."

The monkey snuggled his forehead against the cheek of the man who was holding him. *He* seemed to be content.

"WELL, Mother," said the man in the Norfolk jacket, "I suppose you are quite satisfied now?"

A light spring breeze ruffled his snow-white hair. His shirt was open at the collar. The man and woman stood at a break in the mountain trail and looked at the sparkling waters of the lake below.

"Well . . . yes," the woman said, smiling.

He nodded thoughtfully, "It has been six months since we have had visitors. Yet somehow I feel as though it is as the lull before the storm."

"Always the pessimist," the woman chided him. "No, I don't think there will be others."

"Now, Mother," he burst out in vexation, "it has been a long time since we meddled in *their* affairs. I didn't want you to do what you did."

She was about to reply when the sound of voices came to them from around a bend of the trail.

Carefully the man and the woman stepped forward. Two men and a girl were standing in a small clearing. The

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girl was talking, and they noticed the bright animation of her face.

"Tom found this notation in his brother's effects, Mr. Horton. We thought it was only fair that you should have a share in this project."

The ruddy-faced, smiling man who was listening to the girl, replied:

"Thank you. Mr. Holburn did say something about a plan he had in mind, but I'm quite sure it was nothing like this."

"No," she said, "this idea is Tom's. You see, after his brother's death, he inherited all of the Holburn fortune. And Tom"—she slipped her hand into the hand of the tall, fair-haired man standing beside her—"has one great love."

"Two," her companion corrected.

She smiled up into his eyes and continued:

"Music. It was his idea to establish a camp up here for children with musical talent; to bring famous teachers here; to make this a sort of Mecca for music lovers. And, of course, with all expenses paid."

"Wonderful!" Horton exclaimed; and again: "Wonderful! What more beautiful site could be found! Music and Nature—the complementing Muses."

. . . The old man nudged his eavesdropping companion.

"Come," he whispered, "let us go."

They continued their stroll in silence for several hundred yards. Suddenly the woman burst into lilting laughter and the man looked at her wonderingly.

"Oh dear!" she said at last, "And after all the trouble I went through in putting into Horton's mind the idea of urging people to 'make new men' of themselves by coming to this spot. Of course, that's just what I did for the two who did come here."

"So you did," her companion agreed. "But think of what you did to that third one!"

"He was evil!" she declared disdainfully. "He disgusted me with his utter viciousness. Besides, he was so certain he had the answer to everything that I decided to carry the transformation one step farther." She broke into another fit of laughter, gasping, "He looked so silly, hopping up and down that way with those two guns hanging from his hairy fingers."

"And so," said the man, after a pause, "you succeeded in frightening away anyone else who might want to come here. But now, with the camp those three back there were discussing, there will be hundreds here."

But the goddess Ceres had the last word.

"At least," she said, "I shall have their music to listen to. That will make their presence bearable."

THE END

HOME GROWN MEAT

YOUR red points don't go very far when you insist on steaks for dinner, but they can be made to go a lot farther if you are willing to cooperate.

The government started the Food for Freedom program even before rationing was adopted and one of their campaigns was to convince the people that they could raise rabbits in their backyards. According to the U. S. Department of the Interior, 9,000,000 pounds of rabbit was raised in 1942 and they were trying to raise this to over 11,000,000 pounds in 1943. It is really very simple because all one needs is a buck and three does to start. They will supply the average family with enough rabbit meat and the cost is under 20 cents a pound.

In addition to the rabbits raised in backyards, the commercial raising of rabbits has done much to help relieve the meat shortage and acquaint people with this new meat. In fact, the demand is much greater than the supply.

The Easter bunny had better watch out this year because some enterprising housewife may be setting a trap for him when he delivers the Easter eggs.—*J. Nelson.*

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Romance of the Elements—Thallium

THALLIUM is number 81 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Tl. Its atomic weight is 204.39. Its specific gravity is 11.86. It melts at 302° C. boils at 1.300° C. Metallic thallium is bluish white. Thallium salts are used in the manufacture of certain types, of optical glass due to the high refractive index conferred on the glass. The salts are poisonous, are said to have a pronounced depilatory action, this being unproved.

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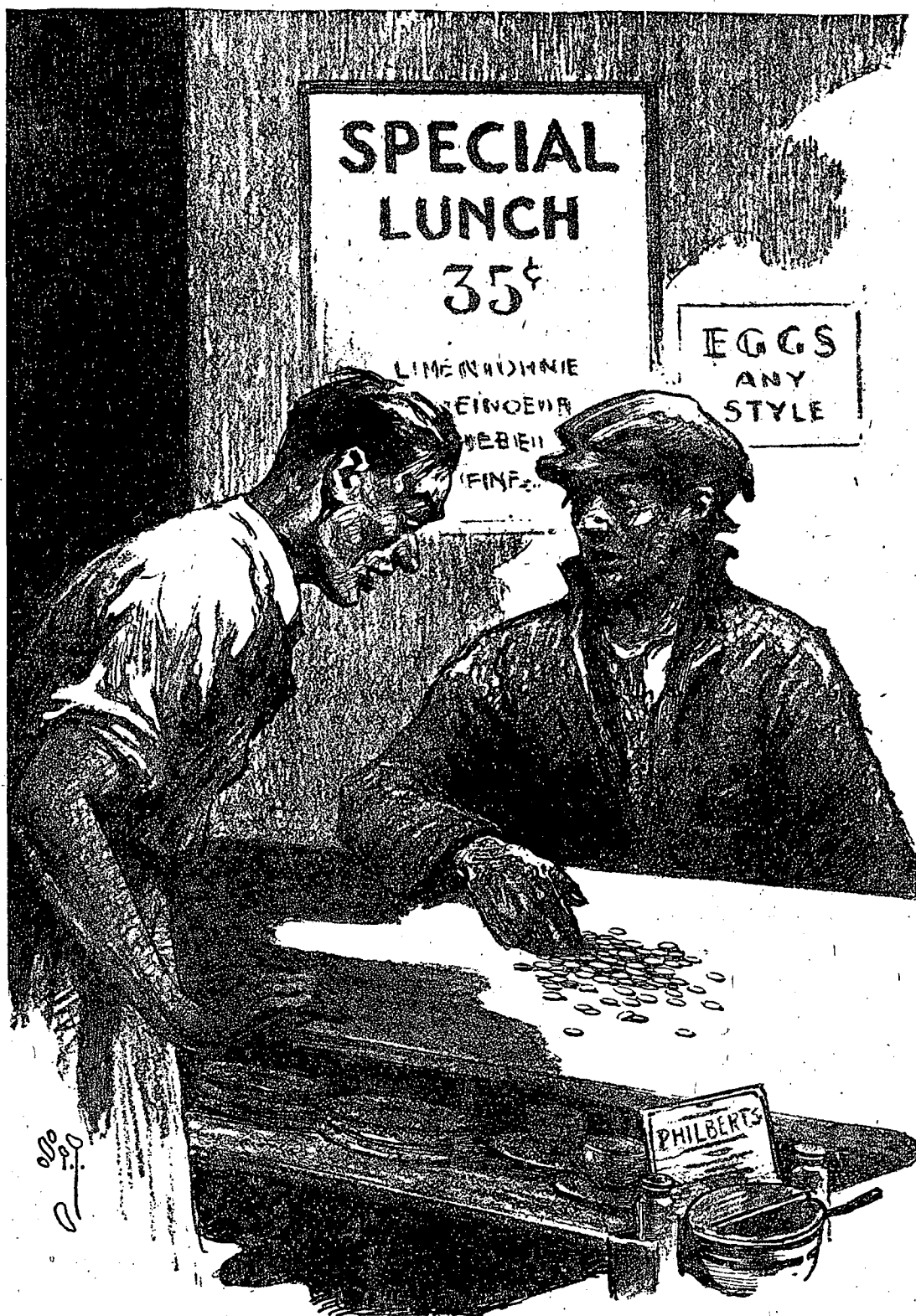

"Dimes," he said, "plenty of dimes! Gimme the whole menu!"

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It's Raining Dimes

He was just a bum walking along under the elevated tracks . . . and suddenly it began to rain; not water, but dimes!

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

DENNIS PATRICK FINNEGAN walked along the dark stretch of Market Street, from Washington to Lincoln. It was still early in the dog-watch—only two A.M.—and Finnegan had six more hours of pavement pounding to do. To his right, the forty-five stories of the Opera Building reared its darkened bulk to the stars. Bordering the pavement on his left were the grimy little stores and warehouses of the street.

Finnegan was on his way to Philbert's, a combination all-night lunch

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counter and cigar stand. Finnegan, who had been a traffic fixture on the corner of Clark and Van Buren Streets, was in the captain's dog-house. He was lost in thought of what had transpired; thoughts which did not paint any too bright a picture of the future.

"How could I know," he moaned, "that the captain was going to make an inspection tour of the traffic posts just when I was having my usual cup of tea at the Manhattan Tea Room? And he found me off post!"

He shook his head sorrowfully at what had taken place when the captain had discovered his whereabouts. A long, lugubrious sigh welled from the bottom of his completely disrupted soul.

"Fifteen years a traffic man," he sorrowed, "and now I'm back to pounding a beat again. On the dog-watch! Oh well—" he shrugged off his unpleasant dilemma with a consoling thought—"at least I'm still in the Loop and not out in the sticks, somewhere."

The cigar-store part of Philbert's business closed early in the evening, but the lunch counter remained open the entire twenty-four hours of each day and night. Not that business was always rushing; it was only so-so from midnight until about three A.M. But from then on, the drivers from the *Herald,* a daily paper, came in for their breakfast before going to load their trucks up with newspapers. And too, the pressmen would also come in before going on the early shift.

Philbert's fronted Lincoln Street, with its back resting against the pillars of an L stub, which ended overhead. That was another reason for its popularity. It was a handy place for a quick snack before getting a train or after coming from one.

Finnegan pushed open the screen door, which was set in the middle of the box-car-like arrangement of the lunch room, and walked in. The single counter-man who was on duty was at the grill end of the counter. He looked up at the blue-uniformed patrolman from curiously pale blue eyes. So pale was their blueness and so lacking in lustre were they, one would have thought he was blind.

"Hiya, Finnegan!" he said in a toneless voice, "what'll you have?"

Finnegan sat down on one of the stools.

"Aahh!" he sighed luxuriously as he relaxed. He had been on this post only four days and already his feet were serving notice of corns and callouses to come. He sighed again:

"Aahh! It's a pleasure just to sit down, Blindy."

"Now that that's settled," Blindy said, "what'll you have?"

"Some ham and eggs and coffee," Finnegan replied.

Blindy served him and went back to the racing sheet in which he had been immersed.

Silence, broken only by the gulping sounds of Finnegan's masticulation, fell upon the lunch counter.

ROCKY MORTON pressed his face, with its week-old stubble of beard, against the all-night restaurant window. Hunger lay stark in his eyes; hunger and terror. His bloodshot eyes caressed the unappetizing display of meats in the restaurant's steam table as though they were the finest product of some famous chef. A grimy hand, nails broken and incrusted with dirt, came up to wipe away a dribble of saliva which had formed at a corner of his suddenly quavering mouth.

Rocky Morton was long past the stage of being hungry. The drinking fountains in Grant Park had provided the only thing to pass his lips in three days. A single dime lay in the one un-

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torn pocket of his frayed trousers. How often in the last three days had he caressed that coin's worn features. Tonight it was to allay his hunger. After that . . .?

Morton shrugged his shoulders as though to say: "Well, this is the end. There is no lower level to which I can go."

The counter-man watched with blank, incurious eyes, as Morton shuffled up to a seat at the white imitation-marble counter. Those eyes had, with a single, certain, measuring look, judged correctly what Morton represented. The counter man acted accordingly.

Abruptly he turned and walked over to the coffee urn. He reached below it and, pulling out a cup, filled it with steaming hot coffee. From a pastry display case, he took two grease-heavy doughnuts. He placed them before Morton and in a voice as blank of expression as were his eyes, said:

"All right, 'bo. That'll be a dime."

Morton's mouth twitched in a wry grimace as he tossed the dime on the counter. The dime lay there, face up, and the legend beside the intaglio face was plain: "In God We Trust."

It was only with the greatest effort that Morton was able to control the shaking of his hands and the spasmodic contractions of his throat at sight of the food. . . .

The white plate in front of Morton was bare even of crumbs, and only the half-filled cup of coffee remained when the still hungry man leaned back and sighed audibly.

Another plate, holding two doughnuts, suddenly appeared beside the coffee cup. Morton lifted startled eyes, to meet the pale blue ones of Blindy.

"But I . . . I didn't order . . . " he began uncertainly.

"That's all right, 'bo," Blindy reassured him. "Go ahead and eat. It's on the house."

He went back to Finnegan and the form sheet. In a few minutes Morton was through, and mumbling a heart-felt, "thanks, fella," he walked out into the night.

Blindy and Finnegan looked at each other through a moment of silence. A twisted grimace appeared on Blindy's lips as he said:

"Wonder what makes guys hit the skids that way?"

Finnegan slowly shook his head.

"Dunno what it is, Blindy. But that's what you looked like when you first walked in here two years ago."

A shadow made the pale blue eyes go dark for a second as Blindy said:

"Were you here that night, Finnegan?"

"Yep. It was about this time of the morning too."

Finnegan's eyes were thoughtful as he brought back that night into his memory.

"It was a hell of a hot sticky night. I was on a special traffic detail at the Opera, and Joe Barnes and I stopped in for some coffee. Philbert was on duty here at night, then. You came in the door and just stood there without saying anything."

"What did I look like? What was I wearing?" Blindy asked. There was a strangely urgent note in his voice.

"You looked like hell, and what you were wearing didn't improve your appearance any. I'd say you looked like that bum that just left."

"Yeah; that's right."

"Well, you stood there for a couple of minutes, quiet; then, as though you kind of thought you ought to say something, you said: 'I'm hungry.' To make a long story short, Philbert fed you. And you wanted to work it out. You did too. Started as a dishwasher."

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"Yeah, I know," Blindy broke in, "Then I became a day waiter. Now I run the joint at night. But who am I? Where did I come from?"

"Dunno, Blindy," the patrolman answered. "Except for one thing, no one knows anything about you. You said one other thing that night. You said you liked to hear the elevated trains run."

Blindy shook his head despairingly. He always ran up against the same blank wall whenever he inquired about himself. And always there was that about his liking to hear the elevated trains running. He remembered the legend on the dime the bum had given him: "In God We Trust."

"I guess God is the only one able to answer this mystery," Blindy thought, as he swabbed the counter.

FINNEGAN was about ready to go back to his beat, when the door opened and Morton walked back in. There was such an air of suppressed excitement about him that Finnegan sat down again.

Morton's eyes were feverish with some inner excitement as he watched Blindy approach him.

"Listen," he began, "do you have steaks here?"

When Blindy nodded his head in the affirmative, Morten went on:

"Well, give me the biggest one in the house. With plenty of onions and french fries and a nice salad."

And as Blindy just stood there, looking questionably at him, Morton pulled a huge fistful of dimes from his pocket and said:

"Don't worry about my paying. Here, see these. There's enough there to buy a dozen steaks."

Finnegan walked over, sat down on a stool next to Morton and said:

"You were kind of short twenty minutes ago. Where did you pick up all that change so suddenly?"

"I—I found it," Morton replied, his voice hoarse with fear and hunger.

"You found it?" Finnegan was skeptical.

"Yeah; under the L stub."

Finnegan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The bum's story was too fishy. There were at least ten dollars' worth of dimes in the fistful he had shown Blindy and he could see a huge bulge in one pocket where other coins lay.

"Better empty your pocket out on the counter here, and let's see how much you got," he said.

There was nothing else for Rocky to do. Blindy set a steak to frying on the grill and came over. The three of them counted the huge pile of dimes which the bum brought forth. There were nine hundred and twenty of them.

"Ninety two dollars and twenty cents," Rocky said in an awed voice, "and they're all mine. I found them."

"Under the L stub?" Finnegan said again in that same tone he had used before.

Rocky looked at Finnegan, and his mouth straightened in a thin line.

"Don't you believe me?" he demanded.

"Sorry, bud, but I don't. We'll take a look though," Finnegan replied. . . .

"NOW show me where you found them," Finnegan commanded, as he and Rocky stood between the girders of the L stub. They were in a hollow square formed by the back wall of the lunch wagon and that part of the L structure which housed the stair leading to the stub platform.

Rocky pointed to a part of the ground which was free of refuse and said:

"Right there. That's where it happened."

"Where what happened?" Finnegan

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demanded impatiently.

"Where the dimes fell on me."

"Where they *fell* on you? I thought you said you found them."

"No. It was like this," Rocky explained: "I walked out of the lunch wagon, broke, still hungry, and no place to go. The river is just under the bridge. That's where I was really headed for. Then something—I don't know what—made me change my mind. I crawled in here and lay down. I'd just closed my eyes when I heard a train, either coming in or going out, overhead: then the sky began to rain dimes. I didn't bother to count. Just stuffed them in my pocket. You know the rest."

"That's your story?"

"That's not a story; it's the truth!"

Finnegan sighed. He was not the sort of copper who liked to make arrests. This, however, was an exception. It was evident to him that the bum thought him a fool, or he never would have given out such a cock-and-bull story.

"Well, bud, we might as well go back to Philbert's and wait for the wagon," he said, taking one of Rocky's arms in a firm hold.

"Then you don't believe me?" Rocky said hopelessly.

"Well, I might have," Finnegan said, as they came back to the lunch room, "if it hadn't been for that L train you heard. They stopped running trains on to the stub at seven last night. And the first one to pull out won't start until seven this morning."

BILL HALLIDAY yawned widely. The desk sergeant at Central Police Station echoed Bill's yawn. It was three in the morning.

"I might as well go back in, Sarge," Bill said. "Doesn't look like there's going to be any stories for me here tonight."

"Ya mean that famous reporter Bill Halliday won't have a story for his paper today," the desk sergeant jeered.

Bill smiled. "Nope," he said. "Not unless something pops in the next few minutes."

Bill didn't have to wait those few minutes. The words were hardly out of his mouth when Finnegan arrived with Rocky Morton. The patrolman was holding a large paper bag, which Blindy had given him. The bag thumped heavily on the desk, behind which the sergeant sat.

Bill Halliday's eyes went wide when Finnegan opened the bag and the pile of dimes streamed out.

"Where the devil did you get 'em?" the sergeant demanded.

Finnegan told him.

"And we'd better hold this man for investigation until we find out where these dimes came from," Finnegan said in conclusion.

Halliday's face held a thoughtful expression while Finnegan was relating what had happened.

After Rocky had been booked and taken below, Halliday took Finnegan aside and asked:

"How long did you say this bum was gone before he showed up again?"

"Oh, not more than twenty minutes."

"Hm. Well, thanks, Finnegan," Halliday said as he started for the door.

"G o i n g somewhere?" Finnegan asked, smiling.

"N-no. Just for a walk," the reporter replied.

"Well, if you *happen* to pass Philbert's, will you stop in and tell Blindy to fix a couple of hamburgers for me. I'll be there in half an hour," Finnegan said, the grin becoming a chuckle.

"Smart copper," Bill had to laugh as he left. "But not *too* smart," was the reassuring thought, as he walked

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toward the stub . . . and Philbert's.

HE STOOD on the sidewalk across from the lunch room and looked up the dark stretch of Lincoln Street. To his left, past the river, he could see the neon lights of the taverns in the flophouse district. But only darkness greeted him on his right. Philbert's, in fact, showed the only light in the immediate neighborhood, except for the lobby lights of the *Herald* building.

His mind went over Rocky's story again.

"Now if what the copper thinks is true," he thought, "then the bum pulled a stickup. If he did, who got stuck up, and where? And how come there were just dimes involved; and when did he find time to do it?"

He crossed the street, passed Philbert's and, using a small pocket flashlight, began to look over the ground behind the lunch room. After a half hour's careful search he looked at the results in his palm.

"Thirty-five dimes," he counted aloud. "Then that part of the bum's yarn was true. But where did the dimes come from and what was the noise of the train he heard? Looks like Bill Halliday is going to adopt a bum named Rocky Morton for a few days."

His search and soliloquy ended, he walked into Philbert's to order Finnegan's sandwiches. Blindy and his assistant, who had just come on, were busy at the twenty-stool counter. The drivers and pressmen were beginning to come in and most of the stools were occupied.

Halliday sat down in Blindy's section.

"What'll it be, Bill—the usual?" Blindly asked when he came over.

"Yeah; and fix a couple of 'burgers for Finnegan. He'll be over in a few minutes. And I want to see you when you've got the chance."

"Sure thing, Bill," the counter-man said, as he called out his orders, "be with you in a few minutes."

The rush slackened for a while, enabling Blindy to give Halliday the few minutes he had requested.

"Look, Blindy," Halliday began, "do you remember everything that happened while that bum Finnegan pinched, was here?"

"I think I do."

"Well, do you remember a train pulling in or out while the bum was gone?"

Blindy's brow knit in thought.

"No," he said, after a few seconds. "The stub ends overhead, so I'd of been certain to hear one. Besides, they don't run cars in here from seven at night till seven in the morning."

"Then that's that," Halliday said, as though there were no need of further questions.

ALL through his sleep, later that night, an elevated train kept running through Bill Halliday's head, and the train would dump millions of dimes over him. And all through the next night, the affair of the bum and the falling dimes kept uppermost in his mind, until he found himself before the desk sergeant at Central Station again.

"Say, Sarge, is that bum, Rocky Morton, still in?" he asked.

The sergeant nodded.

"Got anything on him,"

"Nope. It's a funny thing, Bill," the sergeant replied, "but we've called the Elevated company and there's no record of a Loop station being stuck up. And no complaints came in from that district last night. So Morton's story might be true; that is, if he found the dimes. But he keeps insisting they fell on him after the train passed. So we're going to have the city psychiatrist look him over."

"How's about releasing him to my custody for a day or so?" the reporter

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asked in an off-hand tone.

The sergeant sent a probing look into the bland face of the reporter. Seemingly satisfied with what he saw there, he said:

"Yeah. I think that could be arranged. Stick around for a few minutes and I'll have him sent down."

When Morton appeared before him, accompanied by the lockup man, the sergeant said:

"I'm letting you go, Morton, because there haven't been any complaints on you. Mr. Halliday, here, will be sort of parole officer to you for a few days. Now sign this receipt for the dimes and after sixty days you can claim them if no one else shows up."

Rocky signed the form, as requested.

"Keep your nose clean, Morton," were the sergeant's last words to him as he and Halliday left.

It was about two o'clock, when they reached the L stub. There had been no arrangement between them as to where they were bound for.

It was as if they were two men sharing a single thought.

"Now where were you lying, Rocky, when the dimes fell?" Halliday asked.

Rocky walked over to a smooth piece of ground near a girder directly under the track, and lay down. He lay there for a moment as though expecting another shower of dimes. But nothing happened. So he got up and joined Halliday, who was peering up at the elevated ties.

"I've got to admit it's got me licked, Rocky," the reporter said.

They turned to leave, then stopped in their tracks as a sound reached their ears. It was as though a train was passing overhead. But a train whose wheels were muted, so faint was its passing. Yet so unmistakable was that clacking sound, muted though it was, that they knew. And coincidental with the train sound, there was an even louder noise, tinny, metallic, as of little bells being struck. But they knew it wasn't the sound of bells they heard; it was the musical tinkle of hundreds of dimes striking the ground.

Rocky rushed forward and hastily began to gather them in.

"Well, Rocky, here are your dimes again. And this time you have a witness. And me—" Halliday chortled with glee—"I've got a feature story that'll knock my editor silly."

"Not any sillier than you are, Bill," a voice broke in on them.

THE two men turned startled faces to where the voice had issued from. Finnegan, a broad grin on his face, was standing directly behind them.

"What do you mean, Finnegan?" Halliday demanded.

"How are you going to explain the dimes falling from something that isn't?" Finnegan asked seriously.

"Who the hell is going to *explain* anything. I'm just going to write about it. Let somebody else do the explaining," Halliday said.

"When you print that story, Bill, remember one thing." Finnegan paused, and the reporter asked:

"Sure, what do you want me to remember?"

"To spell my name with a double 'n'," Finnegan replied. "And now let's get back to Philbert's and see how many dimes there were tonight!"

Just as they were about to enter the lunch room, Halliday got an idea.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," he said as he made off for the steps leading to the stub platform.

A wooden gate at the stair head blocked entrance to the platform. He shook and pounded at the gate until he attracted the attention of the uniformed watchman assigned there.

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"What d'ya want?" the watchman demanded. "That gate don't open till seven."

With that, he started to walk away.

"Hey, wait a minute," Halliday yelled. "I want to ask you something."

The watchman returned.

"Yeh? Well, what d'ya want?"

"How many tracks are on this spur?" was Halliday's first question.

"Four."

"Do they all carry cars on them?"

"Nope; got to leave one open for switching."

There was so long a pause after the answer that the watchman asked:

"Anything else you wanta know? Can't spend all night here with you."

"Do they ever switch cars at this hour?" Halliday asked. He wasn't conscious that he was holding his breath while waiting for the answer, until the old man replied. Then he let it out in a sort of explosive snort, for the watchman had said:

"Nope. Not from ten at night till six in the morning. Track stays clear till then."

HALLIDAY'S smile was almost as wide as Rocky's, when he came back to Philbert's. But Rocky was smiling for another reason: there had been a hundred and twenty dollars' worth of dimes this night.

"Looks like you hit the jackpot tonight, Rocky," Halliday said upon seeing the piles of dimes on the white counter.

"Uh-uh, Mr. Halliday. Half of it is yours."

Halliday patted Rocky on the shoulder and said:

"No soap, Rocky. You get my share. And don't worry about it; I got what I wanted, a feature story for the *Herald*."

"What are you going to do with that dough?" Blindy asked.

"Ya know, it's a funny thing," Rocky said slowly and carefully, as though giving each word the proper value, "when I walked in this joint last night and had those sinkers and a cup of coffee—why, it was just like you read in the papers about the condemned man eating his last meal. Well, that was me. A condemned man. A mooch down to his last dime, with no place to go . . . except the river."

Finnegan felt his throat suddenly go tight. He cleared it loudly. Even Halliday felt stirred by the bum's words. They echoed hollowly in his mind: " . . . with no place to go—except the river."

It was Blindy who was stirred most.

"Hell, fella," he said, his voice becoming emotional, "things never get so bad that there ain't an out other than the river."

"That's right," Rocky agreed. "And that's what happened last night. I got my out. When I dropped my last dime on the counter, it fell face up and there it was: 'In God We Trust.' So instead of the river, I tried the back of this lunch room and a shower of dimes hit me. Just like they'd dropped from heaven. You know: every mooch says the same thing—if he had a clean shave, or shirt, or whatever excuse he's got for not working—he'd go out and get a job. Well here's one mooch who's not just talking. When I come in here tomorrow night . . . well, I won't look like this."

"I'll say you won't, Rocky," Halliday said. "And if you'll stick around just long enough for me to get this story on to some paper in my office, we'll start making a new man out of you tonight."

"WAIT'LL you read my story in the morning sheet," Halliday boasted when he came back. "It's the best thing I ever wrote."

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"And it is too," Finnegan agreed. He had made it a point to get a last edition of the paper as he and Blindy were sitting drinking coffee in Philbert's. Blindy, too, had just come off duty.

"Listen to this," Finnegan demanded. He read aloud:

"—and so a ghost train rode the rails last night; a ghost train bearing a horde of dimes. Last night, that train brought wealth to someone. Not alone in the silver coins that rained down on the outcast asleep below, but in the return of a faith— a faith that tells us if we put our trust in God, we cannot go astray. The ghost train will ride again tonight; on whom will it shower its wealth?"

Finnegan stopped and looked at Blindy.

"I can answer that one," he said.

"Yeah? Well, go ahead; my ears aren't plastered down," Blindy said.

"If those dimes fall tonight, they're not going to fall on anyone." Finnegan announced. "Because at noon today, they're going to put up a barrier and a couple of coppers are going to be on patrol twenty-four hours a day. The L people claim that, ghost train or no ghost train, this is not public property and the public is not going to be invited to any treasure hunt," Finnegan announced.

And it was just as Finnegan had predicted. A barrier was erected and the public was invited . . . to stay out. But that didn't stop people from coming down. Day and night, people came out by the hundreds to hear the ghostly sound of wheels clacking over ties and the sound of coins falling to the ground. But the mystery remained a mystery. The dimes fell every night, from where no one knew. And the train rode every night but no one saw it. The elevated company set watchers on the stub; erected powerful search-lights; did everything in its power to solve the mystery. But to no avail.

Bill Halliday kept the public curiosity at a white heat by writing a score card masthead to his daily column.

As far as one person was concerned, the dimes could continue to fall forever. That person was Philbert. Business had boomed tremendously since the story broke; not just the restaurant business but also the cigar store trade. Particularly the baseball-pool players. Blindy had been promoted to night manager of both the restaurant and the cigar store. Business had become so good that Philbert found it necessary to keep the cigar store open twenty-four hours also.

PHILBERT, a large, moon-faced man with a tiny mouth and four chins, was talking business over with Blindy one night. Philbert had a peculiar habit of preaching pessimism to himself while talking to someone else.

"Blindy," he was saying, the customary cigar wagging furiously above his chins, "things is going so good here—I should keep my fingers crossed—that I'm going to put on some more baseball pool tickets—and it will be my luck to get knocked off right away. So somebody I can trust has got to go to Evanston every night to collect the payoff—and just when my holdup insurance lapses, someone will stick you up, I suppose. Well, Blindy, there's nobody I trust like you. So starting tonight, you'll go to Tony's place in Evanston, on Davis street, and bring the payoff back with you. Coming back you can get a special train at Howard Street which leaves at one-thirty and goes only to Lake Street. It only takes twenty minutes with that train—and I suppose the one night you'll have a heavy payout, the train'll be late or something and there'll be a million squawks. That's

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the special's last stop, Lake Street, and I'll fix it so that Finnegan will meet you there and walk back with you."

Blindy could never get used to Philbert's way of talking. Neither could anyone else, for that matter. Blindy's voice was impatient as he said:

"Okay boss, I got it. Tony's place on Davis Street, and get the one-thirty special back. Just don't worry so hard. I'll take care of the payouts."

Philbert, feeling somewhat reassured by Blindy's confidence, left. The new manager spent an hour in preparing the day's winners and in keeping stock straight. Then he, too, left.

Philbert had evidently made arrangements for Blindy's being taken care of, for the whole business at Tony's took only half an hour. Blindy got an evening paper at the news-stand in the station at Howard Avenue and walked up the stairs to the waiting special.

It was a three-car train and it left, just as Philbert had said, at one-thirty. The last passenger to come on was a change collector for the L lines. Blindy noticed that he was a tall thin man with a tight-skinned, stern face. As the train made its way to the Loop, Blindy noticed how the collector would hop off the train before it came to a full stop at each station platform, run downstairs to where the cashier had her change waiting for him; and come back up just in time to leap into the rear coach as the train started off again. It was split-second timing, but the collector never missed.

Finnegan was waiting for him at Lake Street.

"So now I'm a body guard, at five bucks a night," Finnegan chuckled as they walked back to the cigar store.

"You'd think I was carrying of couple of grand with me, the way Philbert worries about that dough," Blindy complained. There was a smile on his lips, however, even as he condemned his boss. As a matter of fact, Blindy liked the big, fat, moon-faced man who was his boss. Philbert treated him more like a son than an employee, and Blindy was deeply grateful to the man for what he had done for him.

"How's it going with the dimes, Finnegan? They still falling?" he asked.

"No. At least they hadn't when I left to pick you up. But we'll probably get back just in time to hear them," said Finnegan. He went on. "Halliday bet Philbert five hundred bucks today that the dimes will fall for at least another month."

"What! Do you mean to say that fat slob of a boss of mine bet against his own interests?"

"Sure," Finnegan replied. "You know Pessimistic Philbert: 'Nothing good can last long.' So he bet the dough. Even money."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

They were a half block from the stub end and had already reached the outer fringe of the crowd, which never failed to appear, when they heard the sound of the ghost train running over the rails overhead.

"Well, Blindy, that's one day less that Halliday will have to wait for his dough!" Finnegan laughed aloud as he thought of the sure thing the reporter had.

"Let's see. This is the first of July. On the thirty-first Philbert is going to pay out five hundred bucks. Nice going, Philbert!" Blindy was computing the time lapse before the bet ended. "A couple of more bets like that, a big payoff on the baseball pool, and we'll both be looking for a job."

They could see the men the elevated company had hired to pick up the dimes, under the stub. And Blindy noticed something else tonight: wagers were being made among the crowd as to

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how many dimes would be found. For, even as he and Finnegan watched, the three men gathering the coins were counting them. Then one of the three, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the entire crowd, yelled, "Nine hundred and sixty-two, tonight."

There was much yelling and some laughter as the betters in the crowd paid off or collected their bets. Then the crowd broke up and made for street cars and L trains.

BLINDY, now operating on a regular schedule, began to like the early-morning trip to Evanston. On hot nights, particularly, he found it to be the only way to keep cool. It was a special run and there weren't many stops.

It was now the last week in July and the ghost train still operated on its regular schedule. Nor had the dimes missed falling for even one night. Halliday would come around early each evening and rib Philbert about the bet they had made.

"Well, fat boy," he say, "just ten more days. Man, I've been wanting to take you for a long time."

Or he'd say, in a sympathetic tone: "It'll be a shame to take those five C's from you, Philbert. Just like taking candy from a baby. Tell you what: I'll lay five hundred more to your three hundred, that the dimes keep falling all through August."

Philbert took the ribbing good-naturedly; but Blindy would get mad about it.

"Was that all you had to bet—five hundred?" he'd yell at Philbert. "It was a lucky thing you didn't bet a thousand. We'll probably have to close anyway." Then he would stalk off to keep score on the Holligan board.

It was the beginning of that last week when Blindy noticed something peculiar about the special train he caught at one-thirty each morning: the rear car had no conductor. At first he thought the conductor was off duty. Then he remembered that the conductor in the car ahead came into Blindy's car to collect his dime. Curiosity impelled him to ask:

"What is this—a two conductor train?"

Silence greeted his query.

"What's the matter? Hard of hearing or something? I asked you if——"

He found himself talking to emptiness. The conductor had continued on his way after taking his dime.

"Now there's a sociable guy," Blindy muttered to himself. "You'd think he'd taken a vow of silence. Him and that change collector and a couple other jerks in this train."

Blindy had had several unpleasant experiences with some of the passengers. On a couple of occasions, he sat down beside someone whom he recognized to be a regular rider on this run. He'd try to get him into a conversation but all he would get for his pains would be a blank stare. Then the passenger would return to staring out of the window.

That, indeed, seemed to be the favorite pastime of most of them. And they all had other little characteristics which set them apart. As he told Finnegan, when the patrolman met him one morning:

"Some of those guys are pips. Tonight I sat down beside some old duck. He must live in Evanston and makes the trip into the Loop every night. Rides all the way to Lake Street, too . . . H'm, that's funny. I've never seen him get off though . . . Well, anyway, this old guy is a clock-watcher and I-hate-the-traction-system-guy."

Finnegan had to laugh at Blindy's description. Blindy went on:

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"He sits there and fusses with his watch chain. Then, when we come to a station, he pulls out his watch and checks the time of arrival with a schedule he carries in his pocket. If we come in on the second, he's all right. But if we're a few seconds late or early—wow! Does he rave! And you know how those trains squeal going around curves. Well, when we hit a curve this old guy almost blows his top. But this is what gets me: He just sits there next to the window and raves—to himself. I've never heard him complain, or even say anything to anyone!"

"Now we have a looney *train*," Finnegan declared, after hearing Blindy out. "Only this train is real. God knows what we'll run into next."

"Say, you got something there, Finnegan. I've never met people like those. They all act like they're crazy or—or——"

Blindy stopped talking and remained silent for a while. Finnegan, who had been waiting for the other stories from Blindy, asked:

"Or what?"

"Nothing," Blindy said shortly.

Philbert's loomed ahead of them and the talk about the mad passengers of the one-thirty special lanquished and died. It wasn't till the next day that a series of incidents took place which created a feeling of deep fear in Blindy's mind.

THE day man at Philbert's had made several mistakes in checking the pool bets and Blindy had to spend a much longer time at Tony's Place than he usually did. In fact, he barely made the train. The collector had already come on and the conductor had his hand on the signal cord ready to give the go sign to the motorman, when Blindy dashed in, just in time. The fact of his being almost too late brought something else to his mind. He sat down beside a pretty girl in a pastel-striped blouse and a dirndl skirt, and mulled over what was in his mind.

"I was lucky to make it. Damn Jack and his figures! Someday I'm going to fire that punk." He sighed as he settled back in the plush-covered seat. The window was open and a cool wind blew in, making the heat a little less oppressive.

His thoughts went back to something which he had noticed several times but paid little attention to. "It's a funny thing, that no matter how early I am, there's always people already in the car. And always the same people. Maybe they work together, or something so that they all get here at the same time."

Then another thought occurred, which made the conclusion he had arrived at seem foolish. The diversity of types and appearances.

"No," he went on thinking, "that can't be. Take my clock-watching friend, for instance. The retired business man type. What would he have to do with that Italian laborer there? Or with this girl, beside me? But what the hell's wrong with me tonight, that I should worry about that? There's probably some reasonable explanation for everything."

With that he went back to reading the reports of the day's baseball games. He was brought out of the world of no-hit games and home runs by a voice. The girl beside him had said:

"How lovely it all was. Those trees and that moon."

He looked over at her and found her staring out the open window. They were passing a small wooded section of parkland on the North Side. Beyond her he could see, through the open window, how the moon made beautiful shadows among the trees.

"Yes, it is lovely," he said in a low

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voice. And then he saw that her eyes were wet with tears.

"Here now, Miss," Blindy went on when he noticed how affected she was by the scene, "there's no reason for that, is there?"

She turned her face to him and he was amazed at the misery their blue depths held. But only for a second. Then the life or whatever it was they held, was suddenly extinguished. A blankness, so empty it startled him, filmed the blue orbs and she turned again to her silent introspection.

He shook his head in a sudden fury, and thought:

"Damn these screwballs! Even this pretty girl! Say one word to them and they freeze over as though made of ice. To hell with 'em if that's the way they feel!"

So angry was he that he got up and walked to the rear of the car. He sat down on the long seat, beside the collector, and went back to reading his paper.

THE train was pulling into its last station when the conductor came in from the car ahead. Blindy watched him pull the money changer from his belt and began to give the collector the dimes it held. The train passed over a switch at that second and the conductor was thrown off balance, dropping several of the dimes. All three men reached for the fallen coins.

For a second, Blindy felt a thrill of horror quiver deep in his belly. Their hands had met by accident and Blindy felt as though he had come into contact with something reptillian, so cold had they felt.

"Like touching a pair of snakes. Or like touching the hands of the dead," were his thoughts as he sat back in his seat again.

Their eyes had met as the three straightened up and Blindy noticed for the first time that those of the collector were as blank of expression as were the conductor's. Yes, blank and empty as those of the girl and the laborer and the——

Blindy shuddered with sudden revulsion when he thought of the eyes in some of those faces. It was as though he had become aware of the reason for their emptiness. The feeling of revulsion remained, even after he met Finnegan.

He was silent for so long while he and Finnegan walked along, that the policeman began to fear something had happened to him.

"What's wrong, kid?" Finnegan asked worriedly.

Blindy told him.

Finnegan stopped short and swung the other around to face him.

"Now wait a minute, Blindy," he said sternly, "you're not making sense. Are you trying to tell me that all those people are dead?"

"I know it sounds screwy, Finnegan," Blindy said desperately, "but somehow it adds up. That girl. What did she mean when she said, 'How lovely it *was?*' But that park is still there. Yet she sounded like it wasn't—for her."

Finnegan was beginning to be concerned about Blindy's sanity.

"Don't be foolish. How do you know it was the park she was talking about."

Blindy looked at Finnegan with a look of surprise. He nodded his head, as though agreeing with Finnegan's remark, and said:

"I don't know that. And it might be poor circulation that made the collector's and conductor's hands seem so cold. At least, it'd be a more sensible explanation than the wacky one I'm giving, wouldn't it?"

"That's right," Finnegan said with

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finality.

But Blindy couldn't lose the feeling that there was something out-of-this-world about the whole business. Yet he also knew there was nothing which could be done about it. Besides, there was more on his mind than L trains and the peculiar people who rode them.

PHILBERT'S was having an extraordinary run of business insofar as the baseball pool was concerned. A wave of welshing had taken place when certain combinations had won. Most of the cigar store operators in the loop were affected by it. But not Philbert; he paid off to the last penny.

As a result, he had profited by his honesty. More people had played that day than ever before. When Blindy helped Jack figure out the results that night, he was surprised at how much had been won and lost. Tony's outfit had been hit for over a thousand dollars; but Philbert's commission amounted to over four hundred dollars on the day's gross business.

When Blindy took the one-thirty that morning, his mind was still busy with the day's business . . . and another thing. There were two more days left in the month, and the dimes were still falling. Blindy wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for Philbert's chances of winning the bet.

There had been some sort of music festival in Evanston that night and the special had many more passengers than it usually carried. Blindy had been a little late again, and the only vacant seat was in the first car. He found himself facing the closed side of the motorman's cab.

They were just pulling out of the Belmont station, and Blindy was going over to take a vacant seat in the center of the car, when the curtain of the motorman's cab rolled up. Blindy's glance at the motorman's face was casual and uninterested as he walked toward the vacant seat.

"Wonder how long Joe's had this run," he thought, as he sat down. He sat there for several minutes, watching the procession of back porches pass in review, before he realized what had passed through his mind when the curtain rolled up to reveal the motorman's face.

"Joe? That's who I thought it was. But Joe who? Where did I see him before?"

Although he did his utmost to figure out where, when and who Joe was, Blindy had to give it up. Besides, he was becoming sleepy. Several times he caught himself nodding. He leaned his head against the window and closed his eyes.

The special pulled into the Lake Street station and discharged its passengers. But the conductor hadn't noticed Blindy, who had slid forward in his seat until he was hidden from view. The conductor pulled the signal cord and the train rolled on its way to Market Street Stub, carrying Blindy with it.

Blindy landed with a thud, which seemed to wrench every bone and muscle in his body. His eyes opened but they saw nothing. He could hear the tortured scream of steel wheels trying to grip iron rails. In a crescendo sound of horror, there came the splintering sound of wood being torn. And higher than all these was the sound of screams from human throats; of people shrieking as a steel-shelled car tore through the wooden covering which no longer protected them. And kept tearing onward until it rested halfway up the wreckage of what once had been an elevated car.

HE HEARD a voice screaming: "Joe! Joe, where are you? I'm

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coming, Joe!" and realized, after a moment that it was his own voice. It was only then that he realized where he was: on the tracks of the L stub, which ended directly above Philbert's.

He arose slowly, painfully. His mind was awhirl; not with questions asked, but with questions answered. He knew now the answer to the whole puzzle. He also knew who he himself was. Stranger still, he was able to associate his present life with the forgotten past.

He made his way over the ties until he reached the platform. But there he ran into difficulties in the person of the watchman. The watchman helped him to the platform, then asked:

"How did you get up here on the tracks?"

Blindy said:

"I rode in on the——" and stopped there. He had been on the point of saying "ghost train." The watchman would have thought he was lying, or crazy. Probably the latter.

"I guess I must have gotten some sort of shock," Blindy explained lamely, "because I remember getting off at Lake Street, all right. The next thing I know, I'm on the tracks out here."

The old man pulled out his flashlight and directed its full rays in Blindy's face.

"Say, I know you! Aren't you the feller who runs that lunch room downstairs?" he said.

"That's right. And I better be getting back before they send the cops after me," Blindy said.

"You're feeling all right now?" asked the old man.

"Sure. When you're through tonight, come on down and I'll fix you a real meal, on me," Blindy said gratefully.

FINNEGAN, his face a mixture of worry and fear, broke into angry words, when Blindy walked into the lunch room.

"Where the hell have you been. I was just getting ready to call in an alarm."

Blindy looked around and seeing the lunch room was fairly crowded said:

"Come outside, Finnegan. I've got something to tell you."

When they got outside, Finnegan said:

"All right, what happened? When I didn't see you come down, I went up to the platform to find out what happened to you. When I didn't see you there. I didn't know what to think. So I came back here . . . and you walk in."

"Finnegan," Blindy broke in on the policeman's complaint, "suppose I were to tell you that I know who I am! And that I rode on the ghost train tonight? What's more, I've been riding on it for a month now. If I told you that, what would you say?"

"That you are nuts," Finnegan answered promptly.

"Well, I'm not crazy. Because what I've just told you is true!"

Finnegan looked at Blindy as though he had gone mad. Blindy smiled when he saw the look on the policeman's face. He went on:

"Do you remember, a couple of years back, there was an L wreck up on the North Side? A North Shore electric train ran into one of the elevated trains?"

Finnegan nodded wordlessly.

Blindy continued:

"Well, hold on to your hat, Finnegan, when I tell you this: *I was the conductor in the last car!*"

Finnegan didn't have to say anything. His face mirrored his utter disbelief. So Blindy told him how he had found himself on the tracks of the stub.

"But what's that got to do with a wreck that happened over two years ago?" Finnegan wanted to know.

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Blindy explained:

"The shock of finding myself on the track must have brought back my memory. Right then, everything puzzling me about that damned one-thirty train was clear. All because of one thing. Tonight, the shutter rolled up in the motorman's cab. When I saw his face, I thought: 'Wonder what Joe is doing here.' Where I got the name Joe, I couldn't figure out. But I know now."

A painful spasm crossed his face at the memory. Finnegan didn't realize how tense with excitement his own voice was, when he asked:

"Go on. Who was this Joe, the engineer?"

Blindy's voice was low:

"*He was my brother!* When I saw him I remembered, too, who the others where. The collector was in my car when that electric train hit us. So were most of those peculiar passengers I met on the special this last month. And that's the ghost train which rides over this stub every night. Now I want to see Philbert. I think I know how to stop the train from running again."

FINNEGAN and Blindy spent the the rest of the morning drinking coffee in the lunch room. Philbert came down about ten. Blindy grabbed him before he had a chance to get even a cup of coffee.

"Now listen, fat-stuff," Blindy said commandingly, "When Bill Halliday comes around and offers to bet some more money that the ghost train will keep on running, take it. And take any other bet he wants to make about the dimes continuing to fall. Because there aren't going to be any dimes tonight; get it?"

Philbert closed his eyes as though in pain. He recited the instructions Blindy had given him, like a schoolboy reciting a lesson he had memorized.

"When Halliday comes around, take any bet he offers. Tonight the dimes stop falling. And how do I know? Because Blindy says so. He got a message straight from heaven; that's how he knows."

"Never mind how I know," Blindy said, "just follow my instructions and you'll be richer before tomorrow morning."

Then, when Philbert went in for his coffee, Blindy called Finnegan over and said:

"Now if you want to make some easy dough, go out in the crowd tonight and bet all you've got that there won't be any dimes tonight."

"What have you got up your sleeve, Blindy?" Finnegan asked.

Blindy smiled and said:

"You'll find out tomorrow, pal. But tonight, just do like I say."

Sure enough, Halliday showed up as usual, ready to take more of Philbert's money. He was very much surprised when Philbert took him on. So was Philbert. Something in Blindy's positive manner gave the fat proprietor courage to take Halliday's bet. Philbert noticed there was something different about Blindy today. A new air of assurance and purpose seemed to emanate from him as though he were going to perform some superhuman task.

The day passed quickly. Just before Blindy started for Evanston, Finnegan came to him and said:

"Look, Blindy, are you sure about that train tonight? I brought a hundred bucks with me and I'd hate like hell to lose it."

"Don't worry; just do as I say."

BLINDY sat down in the same seat he had occupied the previous night. The collector sat beside him as before. When the conductor came over to collect his dime, Blindy said:

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"Hello, Murdock. Remember me—Hank Allison?"

The only answer he got was a stare as blank as any he had received on the train during the previous month. Not that he expected an answer. But he had hoped there might be one. He tried again, this time with the collector:

"Remember me, Thompson? I was conductor on this car, once."

No answer.

Blindy got up and walked over to a notice hanging on the wall. He pulled it from its glass frame and went into the next car. He repeated the business of tearing out the notice in there. The same thing took place in the front car. He sat down then, holding the notices on his lap.

The train was just about to pull into the last stop, Lake Street, when Blindy got up and pushed up the shutter to the motorman's cab. He thrust the three notices in front of the motorman and said, commandingly:

"See these, Joe? They're the licenses the city issues to the L lines to operate cars on these tracks."

He tore the three licenses into bits and tossed them out an open window.

"This is your last trip. I'm revoking these licenses. You can't operate this train anymore, Joe."

THAT night the moonlight, filtering through the steel lattice-work of the L structure overhead, held no glint of silver in its rays. Nor ever again was there the rumble of a ghost train above Philbert's.

MARINE ENGINEERING IN THE INSECT WORLD

WE READ of floods and how humans fare when at the mercy of the elements. Our hearts are filled with pity for the suffering and the homeless. We watch with interest on the movie screen the humorous antics as well as the narrow escapes of people caught in flooded areas. We are apt to forget that there are other than human lives involved in the chaos.

Insects are plagued by floods many more times during the year than humans. A sudden heavy rain will cause a patch of lawn, a meadow, or a field to be vacated by thousands of tiny six-legged creatures. Butterflies, ladybirds, tiger beetles, grasshoppers, ants, and a host of others find themselves flood-bound on tiny islands after a downpour. They must make their escape,—but how?

With the various peculiar, but convenient, features of their anatomies, they travel across the flood by all of the three possible routes—the air, the surface, and the underwater route. The insects that can fly, of course take the air route. The grasshopper is able to leave his island by taking an enormous jump.

Some insects cannot fly, but can swim. We are told that ants, for example, make real swimming movements, rowing with their six legs as if they were six-oared boats and steering to the right or left just as the oarsman steers, by varying the strokes of the starboard and larboard oars.

In contrast to these slow-going ants we find insects that can actually walk and run on the surface of the water. Their tiny legs are supported on the surface film, just as an oily needle if you lay it gently on the water in a glass will rest on the surface film without even getting wet. Since these insects move not through the water, but over it, they encounter no resistance from it, and they can run very rapidly. In this respect they may be compared to our broad, flat motor-boats which, when they are going at full speed, rise up and skim over the surface, thus avoiding the resistance of the water and shooting along at a prodigious rate.

A fourth group of insects, which includes the heavy and clumsy beetle, cannot escape by any of the three foregoing methods. They fly but poorly or not at all; they cannnot swim, and they are not built for walking on the surface of the water. These beetles boldly embark upon the submerged route. They crawl down into the water and walk along the bottom. They probably carry with them a small supply of air in the form of bubbles on the surface of their body. They are able to travel a considerable distance under water before they find it necessary to crawl up on a stick or a grass blade for fresh air.

Thus Mother Nature has equipped the lowliest of inhabitants of this planet with the means of survival.—*Henrietta Brown.*

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DIAMOND OF DOOM

(Continued from page 55)

so quickly to that place where we met?"

"By plane, to Mexico City. Then by car."

He snapped his fingers in annoyance. Of course! Galveston had an airport. Then he asked:

"Look, honey. Will you tell me what this is all about? Why does Toclezuma call me Tlixo? Where are we going? And what are we going to do when we get there?"

"First," she said, "I want you to tell me why you followed me? And what you have to do with Emilio Corta, that you know him so well?"

He was silent for so long that she added:

"It isn't that I don't trust you. It is just natural curiosity, which is only expected of me."

He took her in his arms then, and kissed her in a long passion-filled caress. Nor did she draw away from the embrace. In fact, she answered the pressure of his lips with unrestrained fervor. He released her finally with a long sigh of pleasure and said:

"About a week ago, a group of men came to my office in Chicago.

"It seems they were the board of directors of some museum, from which a valuable robe was stolen. The robe of Ixanthlu!"

She gasped aloud at his words. But he continued with his story despite his awareness that her hand was suddenly no longer in his.

"One of these men, a Doctor Lorenz, gave me a two-thousand-dollar retainer and the promise of five thousand more if I succeeded in returning the robe to the museum. Also he said that he would not prosecute the girl involved, the daughter of a famous anthropologist. It was this anthropologist who, according to Lorenz, had stolen the robe. He had died before they discovered the loss, and in his will he left everything to his daughter, Jane."

He paused to take breath:

"I am what they call a private eye. A private detective, in other words. Have been one for years. And because of my calling, I know human nature pretty well. There was something fishy in Lorenz' manner. In fact, about the whole deal. Well—and this is something which I'd better tell you now, before you learn it through other sources—I have the reputation of being a pretty ruthless guy, getting what I want no matter what the cost."

HE TURNED to her, as he made the last statement and saw that she shuddered. Then she was close to him once more, as if to show her trust.

"I had taken their money. So I had to produce despite my doubts.

"I scouted around before I got down to the business of tracing Jane Smith, and learned several peculiar things. For one, Jane was not Smith's daughter by marriage. He had adopted her when she was a little girl. While he was in Mexico, years before. You see how much I know about you?"

He grinned at the expression on her face, and went on:

"I traced you to that rooming house on Rush Street. And there I found a torn business card, which read: '—Wise Steamship Company.'. It wasn't hard to trace you from that point on.

"But first, let me tell you of the visit to my office of a man named Hernando Corta. The gist of his visit was that he wanted me to find a girl named Jane Smith. There was no mention of a robe. Just the girl. And after giving me five

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Beyond the opening was an inferno of heat

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thousand dollars, he offered me ten thousand more if I were to bring her to an address in Mexico City.

"So now I had two clients: one interested in a robe, the other interested in a girl.

"I couldn't tie the two together, yet I know that somehow their interests were similar. I pieced together bits of information I had found about the robe in a public library. But none of it could tell me why you were of such importance. Then I saw Corta in Mexico City and things became even more involved, for he told me something that was unbelievable. Well, we are alone now. Give me the answer to some of these things:

"Who are you, besides Jane Smith? What is this business of the feathered serpent? Why was a poor spinster, on Rush Street in Chicago, found strangled with a rope that had the feathered serpent pattern intertwined in it? Why does a man who calls himself Mike Hearn deliberately try to mislead me? Why——"

"Wait," she begged, stemming the tide of questions. "Give me a moment to get my thoughts in order."

HE DID as she had asked; and she noticed how his face had taken on new lines. There was something judicial in his manner as he sat and silently waited the telling of her story.

She said: "First—and perhaps that will be all that I can tell you—about myself.

"It is quite true what you said about me being Philemon Smith's adopted daughter. It happened thus: He was on one of his expeditions into one of the little known places in Mexico, when his party ran into an uprising of the Indians. Strange that conditions have changed so little twenty-three years. Anyway, my father came upon the little collection of adobe huts that had been my home. The troops who had put down the revolt had just left, after taking a heavy toll of the villagers' lines. He found me wandering in the ruins of a hut.

"Whether it was because he was a lonely man and wanted affection, or whether his good heart was attracted to the waif in the dead streets, I don't know. But he took me with him and brought me back to the States. There he went through the legal business of adoption. What my life with him was during the years that followed, will take too long to tell. Except to say that I was very happy.

"Three years ago, he went on another expedition and, as was his custom, took me along. This time, he swore he would bring back the robe of Ixanthlu. It had been his goal through the years, this almost legendary robe of Montezuma's daughter.

"A hundred miles from Mexico City, in the heart of the wildest mountain country in all of Mexico, we came to a little-known village. Father had done tremendous research into the Aztec history and was convinced that this village was the birthplace of Montezuma. And so it proved to be.

"Then something happened which changed my whole life. We had been doing some excavating in a valley nearby. The path to the valley was steep and rocky. I slipped and rolled to the bottom. When they picked me up, I was unconscious. It was a hundred miles to civilization, and the only transportation we had were the mules used to come to this village.

"I returned to consciousness in a plastered mud hut. An Indian woman was cooking something in one corner. Kneeling at my side were my father and —Toclezuma."

Willis smothered the exclamation

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which came to his lips at her astonishing revelation. He could barely contain himself from urging her on, as she paused in her story to gather closer the threads of memory.

"It is strange, but when I opened my eyes it wasn't as it is with most people who come back to consciousness. I was instantly alert to what was going on about me. And the first thing I noticed was the strange air of worship in Toclezuma's attitude. Then I became aware of his words.

"He was saying: 'She has come, as it has been told. The daughter of Montezuma. And you shall know her by the sign upon her breast, the sign of Quetzlcoatl. The gates of Chihuatlan shall open at last.'

"I looked at him as though I thought him mad. Then I saw that I was nude from the waist up. My father was also intent on the high priest's words. He asked him what he meant. Toclezuma pointed to the mark between my breasts. It had always been there and through the years I had grown accustomed to it. Now I knew what it was. The sign of Quetzlcoatl is the feathered serpent. And I bore it upon my body.

"Later, Toclezuma told us of the legend. A woman would one day come to them, and they would know her, by the sign, as the daughter of Montezuma. Then the high priest was to go to the hidden city of Chihuatlan and show her to the people. That was what they had been waiting all these centuries for. And the pit should then be uncovered and the serpent let loose.

"It sounded like so much gibberish to us. Except for certain things. I *had* understood him. And he had spoken in ancient Azetc, a language I knew nothing about. What was more, he brought us down to Chihuatlan. I tell you, I have seen that wondrous city of mystery."

WILLIS leaned back against the cushions in perplexity. He knew not what to say. Had anyone else told him such things, he would have called him mad. But there was no denying the sincerity in her voice. Either she had been hypnotized, or it all was true. He stiffened in remembrance of something.

"Say!" he said excitedly. "How about me? Toclezuma called me Tlixo. and I understood him. How is that? Mean to say I'm Aztec too?"

She smiled at his excited query.

"Yes, my love. You are what he said: a warrior chief of the tribe of Ixmantl. Don't ask me *how* he knows, but he does."

"Okay, Jane. On your body was this birthmark. But there isn't anything like that on me."

"No," she admitted. "But Toclezuma has said he *knows* that you are Tlixo. And I believe him."

"Okay, for the while. Now about the murder of that woman? Do you know anything about it? Or what the connection of the feathered serpent had to do with it? And why have you been kidnaped by Corta? What was his purpose?"

"Wait, darling! Give me a chance. No, I don't know why she was killed. Nor anything about the rope. But about Corta; that, yes. But you'll have to wait until we arrive in Chihuatlan."

It was the first he had heard of their goal. So that was where the cavalcade of cars were bound! Hiding his impatience as best he could, he waited for daylight to break, so that he could determine where they were.

HE OPENED his eyes and it was a few seconds before he realized he had been asleep. Jane, her head snuggled against his shoulder was still sleeping. He looked through the window and gulped. They seemed to be riding

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along the rim of a vast crater. He had a single glimpse of the void below, a few feet beyond the edge of the dirt road. It seemed to fall sheer for endless miles. The road wound, higher and higher between a sheer overhang of rock. Now and then he glimpsed the snow-covered peaks of mountain ranges in the near distance. Even close at hand, there was evidence of their extreme height. Wide patches of snow covered the brown ruble-strewn earth.

He looked down with pensive glance at the girl's lovely face, now showing faint lines indicative of the strain she had been through.

She had not yet told him why Corta was so interested in her, nor why he had kidnaped and tortured her. And he had not pressed her to tell, when she had turned from him after relating her life story.

Now the silk of her eyelids fluttered open and a warm color stole into her cheeks when she saw his gaze on her. She also looked through the window and said:

"It isn't far, now. Another ten minutes and we'll be there."

As if her words had been a signal, the driver swung off the road, to the right, onto a path. It led upward between the two walls of a vertical-sided cliff. The path was little more than a couple of wheel ruts that led upward until, at the end, Willis saw the cloud-flecked sky and nothing else. Then they had topped the rise and were descending in a narrow winding spiral. Willis folded his arms across the back of the front seat and watched the driver with grudging admiration. At the beginning, the photographer's clerk had driven with indolent ease. Now he was bent close against the wheel, his hands gripping it so tightly the knuckles showed white.

Willis looked back and saw the three other cars swing off the road and follow them. Then he caught sight of the village against the mounatin side. It looked odd, like a picture postcard with the dark brown mountainside as a frame around it.

Abruptly they were in it, and Willis and the rest stepped out of the car to stretch cramped and aching legs. The natives, dark-featured people, the men short and square looking in their colored blankets, the women squat-shaped. Near each woman were two or three children, wide-eyed in wonder at the appearance of these strangers.

The villagers gathered in a close circle about the girl and her friends. The other cars came up and the occupants stepped out. A sort of moan went up from the crowd at the appearance of Toclezuma. He stood before them, arms upraised, and said:

"I have brought you the daughter of the sun. We journey to the hidden city. Bring animals that we may journey in comfort."

One by one, the men stepped forward and after making obeisance before Jane, went off in the direction of a level bit of ground at the edge of the village where a number of burros grazed. In a few moments they returned with a dozen of the animals.

NEXT Toclezuma took one of the villagers aside and whispered to him. The Indian nodded vigorously to whatever the high priest was saying. The two returned and seven of Willis' party mounted the burros. As they filed down the narrow dirt road that was the village's only thoroughfare, Willis counted them off: Jane, Toclezuma, Garcia, Pepe, Mike, their driver and Willis. And on the balance of the animals were several of the men from the village.

Willis kicked at the side of his mount until it trotted beside the one carrying

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Jane.

She anticipated his question.

"This is the hardest part of the whole trip," she said. "From here on, it's all mountain work. This is how Dad and I went in."

Willis looked about him and wondered how it was possible for these little animals to negotiate the steep sides of this pathless wilderness.

They were above the timber line, and as they wound around a faintly discernable sliver of roadway, Willis fell back. They hunched their way around a great slab of rock and were, for the moment, on level ground. Below and to one side, Willis saw the village plastered against the hillside. That was of minor interest. The lead burro, with one of the villagers astride, was beginning the descent into the first of a series of valleys. Willis gulped when he saw what he was going to go through.

It was straight up and down. The animals would plant their legs on the grade and slide down until they came to level ground. But what was level to them was just a ledge, from which the valley floor was to be seen, hundreds of feet below. Then when they reached the floor, it was only to start over again.

Time after time, Willis thought his burro was going over the edges. But somehow the animal managed to maintain his equilibrium.

Finally they were on a ridge of rock that was like the serrated back of some huge prehistoric monster. It extended for miles. Slowly and with infinite care they made their way along the ridge of the sharp-edged mass.

Suddenly the lead man disappeared. There was no other word for it. One second, he was there; the next, it was as if the earth had swallowed him up.

One by one, the three animals in front of Willis likewise disappeared. It was several minutes before his mount reached the same point, and he saw where the other had gone. It was a cleft in the ridge, down which, fifty feet ahead, he saw the figure of Jane. His burro followed those in the lead. An instant later he was in darkness that was almost like that of night. Once, during the descent, Willis looked back. Up above, past the figures of those following, he saw the sky. It was as if he were seeing it through the wrong end of a telescope.

HERE the animals proceeded with a sure-footedness that was something to marvel at. Willis reasoned that instinct alone guided their footsteps. A little later he looked back once more, but only darkness greeted his eyes. Nor could he see Jane or any of the others ahead.

At last they were in the open. Willis blinked his eyes in amazement. They were in a shallow valley. All about them was the evidence of a fertile land. Here was a field of corn, their tassels bending in the slight breeze. There was a wheat field, glowing golden in the sunlight. *Sunlight!* Willis looked up and saw that it was indeed the sun which shone upon them. He saw, too, why he had been startled at the sight. They were in a hidden valley. For the edges of the surrounding heights folded over the valley, much as the petals of a flower fold over the stamen.

He thought it strange, however that there were no humans in sight. But the ones ahead were not stopping; so he shrugged his shoulders and permitted his burro to continue its sedate pace. They traversed the valley floor and on into the side of the wall that was its boundary. On—*and into it!*

It was a crevice, a crack in the face of the hillside. Willis turned and looked back at the entrance of the valley. At a distance, the wall looked un-

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broken. So it was with this slit in the rock. But as they came closer, it widened out until it was a broad level well-beaten path that led straight into the bowels of the mountain.

He noticed something strange about the walls of the tunnel. They glowed with a strange light. Phosphorescent in appearance, the light seemed to hold an odd warmth.

The tunnel led straight ahead for a considerable distance. Willis was perspiring heavily as they continued to ride without pause. Then the tunnel made an almost right-angled turn and took a downward dip. It was then that Willis saw it.

The fabled city of Chihuatlan!

CHAPTER VII

AS FAR as Willis' eyes could see, the city stretched before him in terraced formation until lost in the dim distance. In the very center of the city, on its lowest level, a pyramid reared its mass upward toward the roof of a cavern so vast as to tax the imagination. It was as if the city inhabitants had hollowed out the whole mountain and built the city on its floor.

Jane, Toclezuma and the rest had dismounted and were holding some sort of pow-wow. Mike and Willis joined them. The conversation was in an Indian dialect, and the two Americans had to wait for a translation. When the talk was over, the Indians made obeisance before Jane once more, mounted their burros and started back.

"What was the conference about?" Willis asked.

"They aren't permitted past the screen," Jane replied. "So they have to turn back at this point."

"What was Toclezuma telling them?" Willis persisted. He had noticed the air of stern warning in the high priest's manner when he was talking to the Indian leader of the guides.

"He suspects that we will be followed. He senses, somehow, that our movements are known to Corta. And if Corta follows us here, he wants the Indians to give us warning."

Willis nodded. He had had an idea all along that such was actually the case.

"Watch!" she said commandingly, holding tight to his arm.

Toclezuma walked forward until he stood poised on the lip of the decline. There he turned aside to a projection of rock and, reaching into a crevice, pulled out a strangely shaped hammer made entirely of stone, the head wedge-shaped. As the others crowded around him, he struck against a sort of small depression in the rock. Willis saw then that the dent was shaped to fit the hammer's head.

Before his unbelieving eyes, an immense section of the wall swung upward. Now he saw that what he had thought was the view of the city was only a reflected projection of it. The wall was a mirror. And as Toclezuma walked into the tunnel which led beyond the mirror, he saw there was a second one set up at such an angle that the first projected an image thrown against it by the other.

"Holy cats!" Willis ejaculated. "The whole thing is done with mirrors."

"No," Jane said softly. "It isn't all done with mirrors. You'll soon see. But the city must take certain precautions against intruders. This is one. It looks like a mirror and is made of the same materials. But there is nothing in the modern world to equal it. Only high explosives could shatter it. And the only means of ingress is that hammer which in reality is a key. Soon he'll use it again. Then you'll see the wonders of Chihuatlan."

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THE high priest had passed from view around a bend in the tunnel. As they followed him, Willis saw their path led in a half circle which ended against the smooth face of a wall.

Here, Toclezuma inserted the hammer's head into another opening. This time, however, he turned it as one does a key. Pulling it out, he waited. Nor did it take long. In a few seconds, the wall rolled upward, like the door of a modern garage. Confronting them were a dozen of the most strangely dressed men Willis had ever seen.

They were identically dressed in a sort of kilt-like affair. From the waist up they were nude and their naked, muscular chests gleamed with oil. The skirts were made from the feathers of some bird. Around each man's head was a circle of silver holding the long black hair in place. Each held a short thick-bladed sword. And in the hawk features, compressed lips, and gleaming eyes was to be seen the same expression —a wild gleam of fury.

But when they saw the girl and the high priest, they fell upon their faces in the dust.

"Arise, warriors!" Toclezuma commanded, "and conduct us to Ticamo."

The men formed a guard of honor about the party and led them down a great flight of stone stairs. Now Willis saw the city in all its glory. What the mirrors had shown was the city in an upside down view. Now Willis saw that the pyramid-shaped building, although in the center of the city as he had originally seen it, was not at the bottom but at the top.

And the city was not as large as he had thought it to be. In fact, the thousands of homes he had imagined he saw, was the result of a trick of perspective. Altogether, there were no more than perhaps a few hundred.

At the bottom of the stairs was a vast section of open ground, and at the other end, another flight of stairs. But this was not like the short flight they had just descended. Made of sections of immense stones cut in rectangular shape, they led straight up to the temple at the top, fully a hundred and fifty feet above.

Waiting for them, at the beginning of the huge stairway, was an immense crowd of people. How they had known of their coming was a mystery to Willis. He saw hundreds of warriors among the throng. Women, dressed in white gowns which swept in straight lines to the ground, held children in their arms, or close to them. There were men who were not warriors.

And when these people saw Jane they fell to their knees in a single move, awe-inspiring in its spontaneity.

As the warrior-guarded group continued up the stairs, the entire population followed. Upward they went, step by step. And as they neared the apex Willis felt a strange, choked-up feeling such as he had ever known before. It was as if he was coming home, as if he had been away for a long time and now that he was coming back to all this that meant so much, his breast was full of emotion too great to bear. Somehow he knew that when he arrived at the apex of the stairs, someone would be waiting to greet him.

Then they were before the temple.

IT STRETCHED upward for a hundred feet more, almost to the roof of the cavern. Before it was an open space, made of fitted blocks of the same stone from which the stairs were made.

And in two solid lines between which they had to pass, were several hundred warriors, their eyes set straight forward, as if it was not meant that they should look upon these visitors. The party, with their guard beside them, marched

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between the lines of warriors and into the temple.

It was of simple construction. A central hall, from which several ante-rooms branched. But the central hall was large enough to hold all the population of the city. At the far end was a group of men.

The guard stood to one side when they came into the temple proper. Now, with Toclezuma in the lead, they came forward, until they were face to face with the group at the far end. Again Willis had a feeling of anticipation. He felt that he knew these men.

One of them stepped forward and embraced Jane, saying:

"At last you are here, my child."

Willis looked at him with curiosity. He was very old, with features mellowed with age. He moved past them and, with the others of his retinue following, made his way outside. The people were still there as if they had known he would come.

In a voice which, in spite of his age, was resonant with power, he said:

"Let this day be one of feasting and joy! For Ixanthlu has returned. Go to your homes and prepare for the great day of sacrifice on the morrow. Momictli, the great god has long been awaiting this day."

A sigh arose from the crowd upon hearing these words, a sigh like the rustling of a great wind. Then they dispersed and went back down the stairs.

The old man turned and went back into the temple. But not all who had been in there had followed him out. There were three who had remained within.

THEY stood, tall, arrogant-looking men, before a sort of altar at the far end of the temple. And on each face was the same look. Indeed, they looked very similar in every respect. Noses like the blades of scimitars. Eyes, deep-set and glinting with ill-repressed fires of anger. Mouths like the slits in a scabbard, from which would come biting words of their hatred. For it was all too apparent to Willis that these men hated the old man, whoever he was. And he saw too, that these were warriors, not priests. The priests were easy to recognise. They wore toga-like dress, that somehow resembled those of the women. Nor did they bear arms, as did the three who stood, arrogant and aloof, to one side.

"Well, Chitzl," the old man began, upon seeing the look of displeasure the leader of the three bent upon Willis and Mike. "I see by the curve of your mouth that something displeases you. What is it now?"

Chitzl stepped forward and, looking the old man straight in the eye, said:

"Aye, learned and wise Ticamo, I am not content with what Toclezuma has brought!"

"How do you mean, with *what* Toclezuma has brought? Are they beasts, that these men shall be called in such contemptuous fashion?"

"Forgive me," the other replied. But there was that in his voice which gave the lie to his words. "But I say again, that we are judging too hastily the words of the high priest."

Mike looked at Willis and with his eyes begged for a translation. He could hear in the man's tone that there was something amiss and that it meant them no good. But Willis was too intent on hearing the rest of what was going on to pay any attention to Mike.

Now the old man replied:

"And when he brought Ixanthlu before us, were you not the first to raise a voice extolling the god-given wisdom of Toclezuma?"

"Aye," said Chitzl. "But . . ."

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"Then," said the old man in tones that brooked no denial, "his wisdom has not been lessened in the last few days. As it was given to him to see Ixanthlu, so was it given him to see Tlixo."

The warrior nodded his head in silent aquiescence to the old man's will. But there was that in his eyes which spoke of hatred for Willis.

Then, with a wave of the hand, the old man dismissed the three and started toward one of the anterooms. But he stopped before he had taken more than ten steps. Toclezuma had confronted Chitzl and with flashing eyes and hard-bitten words was saying:

"This is not the first time, sword-wielder, that you have found cause to question my words. If they please you not, there are those who can judge their rightness."

Chitzl whirled on the high priest, whose hand held him firmly. Jerking himself loose from the restraining fingers, he sent words of anger from between narrow lips:

"Nor are they the last words you shall hear! The council of ten will not always rule in your favor, priest."

Willis suddenly found himself between the two. He said:

"I gather that I am the point of contention?"

Chitzl sent Willis a look of hatred. In scornful tones he said:

"It is plain that Toclezuma has brought back another speech-maker from the land of the infidel. Bah! And he presumes to tell us that this is a warrior chief. This ragged and filthy . . ."

Willis did not wait to hear the rest. His fist caught Chitzl full in the mouth. The warrior reeled back, blood pouring from lips split open by the blow. Then his sword was out and with a wild leap he was upon the defenseless Willis.

WILLIS crouched as the other approached. As the sword came down in a swipe which, had it connected, would have cut him in two, he leaped to one side. Before the other could recover his balance, Willis stuck out a leg and tripped him. Chitzl sprawled forward on his face, the sword falling from his hand. Willis picked him bodily from the floor and, holding him firm with one hand, slapped him across the face half a dozen times.

He released him in time to meet the other two who, seeing what was happening to Chitzl, came charging forward to his rescue. But Mike had foreseen their intentions. Voicing a warning cry, he stepped into their path.

But as quick as he was, the one who was called Ticamo, was ahead of him.

There was something in the way he stood there that made all of them come to a pause. So powerful was his personality, so commanding his presence, that the flame which lighted the eyes of all the men was extinguished by the sight of the old man facing them, his features alive in ill-concealed contempt.

"Hold!" he cried in a loud voice. "How dare you profane the temple of the great god? Save your quarrels for more appropriate surroundings. Chitzl, go! and take the rest of your men with you."

Toclezuma bowed his head in the face of the justified rebuke. Then, when the old man resumed his walk toward the nearest anteroom, they followed in chastened meekness. But Willis knew the dislike Chitzl had shown during the brief exchange, was now open hatred. He felt sure that their quarrel was not ended.

The old man sat down in a sort of low throne on a dais. They gathered close about him. He shook his head sadly and said:

"This must not be. Chitzl has too

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strong a temper for his own good. And he wields a great power among the warriors. No. This is not the time for quarrels among us. I must call the council together tomorrow, Toclezuma. Chitzl must be curbed."

Toclezuma bore an air of vast dignity as he said:

"Then all is in readiness?"

"Aye," the old man replied.

"Good! For our enemies are also ready. It was fortunate that we were able to anticipate them. And the sacrifice?"

"The virgins are being given their instructions," the old man replied.

Willis felt the hair at his nape rise at these words. And when he looked at Jane, he saw that she had turned pale.

"Just a minute," he said in a soft voice." Do you mind if I ask a few questions?"

"Speak, Tlixo," the old man commanded.

"I'm a stranger here. You call me Tlixo. Why the name seems familiar to me, how I understand your language, why all this is like as if I belonged here, is something I don't know.

"Ask what you will, and it shall be answered."

"Well, then. Why have we been brought here? What is your purpose with us? What is this sacrifice?"

THE old man sent Willis a shrewd glance of appraisal as if measuring him. Seemingly satisfied with what he saw, he said:

"You have been brought here because you are Tlixo, an Aztec chief. As for Ixanthlu, she, of course, has the place of honor in the morrow's holy day.

"We have no *purpose*— as you call it—with you. Tomorrow is the day which has been foretold by our ancestors; the day that the first step in the liberation of our country from the infidel invader."

Willis interrupted him:

"What infidel invader?"

"Those who are the spawn of the first white who put our ancestors to death by torture. They shall be driven from the land. They shall be——"

"Wait!" Willis interrupted.

Ticoma stopped, mouth agape. Never before had such a tone been used against him.

"How are you to do this? With swords? Or maybe you're planning on the Indians revolting. Fat chance they'd have against the machine guns and cannons."

Ticoma smiled and Willis noticed that his teeth were as white as though he were a youth instead of an old man.

"I can say that you speak from an ignorance that is only natural," Ticoma said. "If you remember how you were brought here, you will understand that we are well aware of modern things. And insofar as the Indians are concerned in our plans, almost all inhabitants of the country have Indian blood in their bodies. And the same is true of the army. I assure you that all this has been taken into account.

"As for the swords you saw . . . Well, we have more potent weapons, and means for releasing them. Do not judge our resources by what you see here."

Willis digested in silence what Ticoma had said. The he asked:

"And this sacrifice? What did you mean by that?"

Ticoma folded his arms across his chest and said:

"Momictli, whom some call Quetzlcoatl, has waited four hundred years for this sacrificial day. Countless virgins have been instructed in their duty, in the hope that the day would come in their lifetime. But there have been

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none who were able to read the wheel of the future until Toclezuma was made high priest.

"The feathered serpent will wait no longer. For on the morrow, he will feed upon the six virgins who have prepared for the ceremony."

"W—what! Willis gasped. "You mean to say that you are actually going to sacrifice humans?"

"Why is Tlixo surprised? It was the custom of our fathers. Is there any reason our way should be different."

"Well, count—" He stopped, stifling the exclamation of pain which came to his lips. Mike had kicked him, in warning. Mike, in the dark about what was being said, still was able to tell from Willis' voice, that something had been said which did not meet with his approval. So he had kicked Willis as a silent reminder to hold his tongue.

Ticoma went on:

"We have not been idle with the passing of the centuries. Our men of science have put to use the hidden knowledge of the ancients. Come, let me show you some of the things which we have had in readiness for the day."

He walked to a door at the far end of the temple, and waiting until they had all gathered before it, took a small mallet from his belt and beat upon its metal frame. The door opened to the signal and they all walked into the room beyond.

Willis wondered who had opened the door, since there was no one else in the room. He looked about him in wonder. The room resembled a decompression chamber he had once been in.

Ticoma gestured for them to be seated. Then he twisted at one of the valves and a hissing sound was heard. Willis felt a tightness in his chest, a feeling of peculiar lightness, then the hissing stopped and Ticoma whirled another valve. And what had appeared to be a solid section of the wall, opened in the center and they saw that it was another door. But what lay beyond made Willis gasp.

It was a vast laboratory. Fully a hundred men were gathered at benches and before tables, busily engaged at their work. So immersed were they, that they failed to notice the visitors.

Ticoma walked down the center of the huge room, the others following. Willis saw that all this was new to Jane for she was as wide-eyed as the rest. Then he stopped before another door, at whose side were two men. These were not armed as were the guards with whom Willis was familiar. Nor were they dressed in kilts. These men wore tightly fitting breeches and a blouse-like shirt. Boots were on their feet. On seeing who had come to the door, they brought their weapons—weapons which strongly resembled sub-machine guns—to port.

TICOMA raised his arm in a sort of salute and they opened the doors to the room beyond and Ticoma and the rest passed through. Here, Ticoma opened a series of drawers which lined the walls of the room and took out a number of metallic robes. Or so they appeared to Willis and the rest.

"First," Ticoma said, "put these over your heads. Otherwise you will be burned."

When he saw that they had done as he ordered, he opened a whole section of the far wall. Motioning them forward, he nodded his head for them to look.

Willis peered through the glass-like aperture which had been cut in the material in which he was draped. He sucked in his breath sharply, at what he saw. Before him was a billowing sea of flame. As far as eye could see, flames danced and shot skyward. He

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looked up and saw there was no roof to this internal conflagration. Nor could he see any boundary to any side. It was as if this room were a shore against which this flaming sea beat uselessly.

Then Ticoma motioned for them to return. He closed the wall section and the leaping, dancing light was extinguished.

"That," Ticoma said, when he and the others had removed the protecting robes, "is the main reason for my saying that there is no doubt of the outcome of our plans. We will be successful because of that alone."

"Yeah?" Willis lips pursed in disbelief. "It certainly looked pretty. But what was it supposed to be?"

"A sea of lava," was the astonishing answer. "You see," Ticoma went on, "almost all Mexico rests upon a vast crust of rock, below which is this sea of fire. Thus far there has been no excess of pressure against the molten mass. But imagine, if you can, such external pressure has been applied. It must escape somewhere. And we can, at any given moment, apply that pressure."

"But you won't," Willis said. "Because if you do, there won't be a person alive in all the country."

"That is if we are indiscriminate in releasing the pressure," Ticoma said, smiling. "But we won't be. The White Woman and the Smoking Mountain will suddenly break forth into flame and fury. There will be such an eruption of lava and gases from these two that all the cities between them will be innundated. Then, we will come out from this hidden city, and with the weapons we have, conquer all Mexico. Nor will there be any to oppose us; any, that is, who have an organization."

"You mean that you've got pipes laid to those volcanos? Wait." Willis tried to gather his wits together. Ticoma's words had so filled him with horror that he found it hard to think straight. "You mean," he continued, "that you are going to kill all those people?"

"Yes," Ticoma answered. He even smiled as he said it. And Willis wondered how a man could look so benevolent, so wise and still harbor such thoughts of cruelty and murder. "Yes," Ticoma went on. "The fact that millions may die in the eruption is of small concern in view of the great good that we shall then be unopposed in our plan."

"But still," Willis went on, dogged insistence in his determination to learn the plans of these people, "there will be enough to stop you."

"Here," Ticoma said, taking him by an arm. He led him to a bench at which a man was working. The man was attired in a robe similar to the one Willis had put on when they viewed the sea of lava.

"Can you understand what this man is doing?" Ticoma asked.

Willis shook his head.

"He is refining radium," was the reply.

"Radium!" Willis gasped aloud—and in English.

"Radium?" Mike echoed. "Where?"

"In that large tube," Ticoma answered unexpectedly. "We get it from the lava. There are men working here who are using radium to break down the atom for our use. It won't be long before they are successful. Then we shall have power to use—power which will be irresistable."

WILLIS' imagination was staggered by all this. He began to see that he had completely underestimated these people. And he was sure that he had not yet seen all their weapons.

Again in English, and seemingly for Mike's benefit, Ticoma said:

"Why are you so surprised? If four

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hundred years ago, our scientists, with only the poor tools of their day, were able to construct pyramids, bridges, viaducts and roads which are to this day considered engineering marvels, why in the time since, should they not have been able to further their discoveries? You have seen some of the things we have done. And there are others you will see when the time comes—others that will make you realize the true wonders of our civilization."

As Ticoma had pointed out, it was all very wonderful. But there was something else bothering Willis.

"I still don't get the business of what we saw in Chihutlan," he said. "Why do you need Jane here? And why the sacrifice? And what's the sense of using the past to control the future?"

Ticoma started back to the decompression chamber, Willis at his side. The rest followed in silence.

"The old way must not be lost," Ticoma said as he opened the doors. "The god must be appeased. These things you saw are only the science of our power. They do not make for peaceful living."

"I still don't get it," Willis argued. "Down here you're modern. Up there you're living in the dead past."

"Because," Ticoma explained, "the people up there are not aware of what we have. Nor is it any of their affair. We are the rulers. We are capable of ruling wisely and to their benefit. That is enough."

Again they sat upon the wooden benches and experienced the same strange feeling as before. Then Ticoma opened the doors and they stepped out . . . *into the arms of Chitzy and his men.*

CHAPTER VIII

THIS time, Willis and Mike had no chance to fight back. Before they were even aware of what was going on, their arms were bound to their sides and they were lying in the dust of the passageway leading to Ticoma's room.

Chitzl looked down with a sneer at the two.

"So Ticoma has been showing you the wonders of our world!" he said. "And giving you, no doubt, *his* idea of what is going to happen when *he* gives the sign. Well, I'm the one to say what will be from now on."

Willis looked toward Jane, struggling vainly in the arms of two of Chitzl's warriors. He twisted savagely at his bonds. But they were taut against his skin.

Ticoma, unbound, but watched by several of Chitzl's men, said:

"You have committed sacrilege, Chitzl. Not only against me, but against your god. For that, you will be made to pay."

Chitzl walked up to the old man and struck him lightly across the face with his hand.

"And who, oh wise and aged fossil, will make me pay? The council of ten?" He laughed, a short and bitter bark. "Did you think I would wait for you to arrive to arrange sentence? They are where you will be on the morrow. In Momictli's pit. As for me, I shall lead the people to the task of conquering this new world above. But with this difference: I shall see to it that *all* the internal fire is let loose. Then, with the weapons at my command, *I shall go forth and conquer all the world.*"

Ticoma went pale at Chitzl's words. Willis, however could find no sympathy for him. Chitzl was only taking a leaf from the old man's book.

The Aztec warrior turned from the two bound men on the floor and stepped in front of Jane. Taking her by an arm, he turned to the enraged Willis and

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said:

"As for Ixanthlu—I shall take her as my bride. It is only fitting that the daughter of Montezuma shall have as consort the bravest and greatest warrior in all the land.

Jane's guards had released her at Chitzl's approach. Her hand swung back, and clenching her fist, she struck Chitzl across the mouth with all her strength. He reeled back in surprise, blood streaming from torn lips. Then he stepped forward and struck her with his open palm. She sank to the floor with a low moan of pain.

"For that," Ticoma intoned in awe-inspiring words, "you shall pay. Nor can you escape your fate."

Chitzl paled at the old man's words. Then, before the horror-stricken eyes of all, he drew his sword from its scabbard and drove it to the hilt into the man's body.

PLACING a foot upon the neck of the dead man, Chitzl withdrew the sword and wiped its blade on the once white robe Ticoma wore.

He said: "He talked too much. You men! Take these carrion to the pit to await the sun's rising! As for the girl"—he leered down at Willis—"I will teach her that the taming of a wildcat and the taming of a woman require the same tactics."

The men he had designated started to obey his orders, when one of them asked:

"What about these?" He pointed to Toclezuma, Pepe, Garcia and his assistant.

Chitzl was silent for a while in thought. Then:

"Those three," he pointed to Pepe, Garcia and the perfumed assistant, "take to the pit also. I have something in mind for Toclezuma."

Willis and Mike were put upon their feet and, with several of the warriors holding sword-points at their backs, started on their way to the pit. They turned at the door through which, earlier that evening, Ticoma had ushered them, and reaching a stairway started downward.

The reached a corridor halfway down

Then, before the horror-stricken eyes of all, he drew his sword and drove it to the hilt into the man's body

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the stairs and turning off, moved down the corridor. Willis, head bowed in misery, suddenly heard the sounds of human voices. He lifted his head as the sounds came closer and he was soon able to make out the words.

He heard "traitors! renegades! murderers! and a few more choice and pungent names reflecting on the ancestry of Chitzl and his cohorts. Then they came on a number of men lounging against the corridor wall. Opposite these a number of cages were set into the wall. The screams, shouts and noises came from the assorted people in the cages.

"More cage bait," one of the guards said, rudely shoving Willis and his friends into one of the cages.

Their fellow prisoners silently made way for them. But they gave them odd looks. Especially Mike and Willis.

Garcia looked about him, and recognizing several men whom he knew, called them aside and questioned them. He returned to the rest after a moment and said:

"That damned traitor! He had it planned all the while. He was only waiting until we brought the girl. By now, he's seized the laboratory and his men control all the key points. But he's a fool, though!"

Willis jerked the slim photographer to him.

"Out with it!" he demanded. "You know more than you're saying. What has that so-and-so got up his sleeve?"

Garcia looked up at the angry face of Willis.

"Listen," he said tersely. "For hundreds of years the Aztecs have been planning this. The re-conquest of the country. All the vast abilities of their scientists have been put to that single use. What Ticoma showed you down there in the underground laboratory is only the surface of their resources. If the world only knew. . . . For example, did you know that you were ten miles underground?"

THEY looked their amazed surprise.

"Yes," Garcia went on. "It took them three hundred years to build that tunnel. Did you ever see the pyramids in Yucatan? They were supposed to have been built by hand, but I know the truth. Even then they had machines to do the work. And Chitzl threatens to let loose a gigantic flow of lava throughout all of Mexico. Well, it can be done. Don't ask me how. I'm not an engineer. But they have ways of regulating the pressure, so that instantly and simultaneously, every volcano extinct or otherwise, will go into eruption. But he's a fool, I repeat. For he doesn't know what I do. And perhaps I'm the only one. If he were to unloose that tremendous force, there would be no way of controling it. Not only all of Mexico would be showered with lava and ashes but half the world would feel the consequences."

When Mike saw that the flow of tears had stopped, he said: "Is there any way we can prevent him?"

"Yes," Garcia answered in a hopeless tone. "If we can get to the laboratory. Porte Arunas, my assistant here, knows the cut-off valves. But how are we to get out of here?"

"There's got to be a way," Mike answered.

Willis nodded. "Yes, and I'm going to find it." But his thoughts were of the girl, now in Chitzl's power.

UNKNOWN to Willis and the rest, two columns converged upon the hidden valley from opposite directions. Nor did either of these columns know of the other's existence.

The one coming down through the mountains from the north was composed

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of several hundred men, motley in appearance and armed for the most part with pistol and rifle, although there were several groups of men who carried the dismantled parts of machine guns. And just behind the four men at the head of the column were half a dozen men who carried two small field mortars on the backs of their horses.

The column coming up from the south was much larger and far more heavily armed. Composed for the most part of trucks, there were also ten tanks among them. At the head of the column was a staff car with several uniformed men in the rear seat.

WILLIS shouldered several of the men aside and stood leaning against the bars. If the situation weren't so serious, he would have found it amusing. Half the time he had spent in this country had found him in some sort of prison or other. And the other half he had spent in some sort of mad chase. Now he stood and glowered at the thick-shouldered guard who was leaning in indolent ease against the opposite wall.

The guard's sword hung from its scabbard and Willis saw the key to their cell hanging from a chain at the man's side. The guard lifted a thick forefinger and scratched at his nose and Willis was reminded of Pepe by the action. In fact the guard looked like Pepe.

Take away the kilt, Willis thought, and put it on Pepe. And no one would be able to tell the difference. And with Pepe's mop of uncut hair . . .

Pivoting swiftly, Willis returned to Garcia and the others. Calling them close he said:

"Listen! That guard—notice how much Pepe looks like him. Well, if we could get him close to us here and get the key away from him . . ."

Garcia turned a casual glance in the guard's direction. But there was nothing casual in his eyes. Turning back to Willis, he said:

"It could be done. We are in the last cell. And it's around a bend in the corridor. None of the rest would see what was going on. But then what?"

"What's the difference?" Willis said impatiently. "So long as we're out of here."

Pepe suddenly made his presence felt.

"It would be simple. I got something with me." He reached down into the top of his boot and pulled out a knife. "If we can get him here . . ."

Willis looked about him. Besides the last five to be placed in the cell, there were twenty others. Some of them, Willis saw, were dressed as warriors. He guessed that not all the warriors had gone over to Chitzl.

"Listen, Garcia," he said. "Here's how we do it. You speak their language. Call them over and tell them we want to get out."

Garcia did as Willis asked, without demanding an explanation. When the twenty men had gathered round, Garcia told them Willis had plans for their escape. Then, when they gave low-voiced agreement, Willis outlined his plan.

IT WAS simple. One of them was to call the guard over and whisper that he had changed his mind. He now wanted to join Chitzl. For while they had been talking over the plan, one of the prisoners mentioned that Chitzl had told the prisoners if any should change their minds, to let the jailer know and he would release them. Evidently Chitzl had expected a wholesale turnover.

"Great!" Willis exclaimed on hearing what the man said. "That'll make it easier and arouse less suspicion."

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Then Willis told them that when the guard opened the door, the warrior was to use the knife which Pepe gave him. The whole thing wouldn't take more than a few seconds. Then there was the sound of sandals in the corridor and the warriors returned to their places.

The guard looked in, but on seeing the prisoners were as he had left them, he returned to his favorite position against the wall.

Suddenly there was the sound of voices raised in argument from the corner where the warriors were. There was a scuffle and one of them broke away from the rest and ran to the bars. Calling to the guard, who had drawn his sword at the disturbance and had come close, preparatory to calling for re-inforcements, the warrior engaged him in conversation for a few seconds; then, while prisoners held their breaths, the guard moved over to the door and opened it. The warrior sidled along the bars, as though fearful the rest intended him harm, and reaching the half-open door, started through.

As if they had rehearsed it for weeks, three of the warriors leaped for the lone man. The guard, seeing their intentions, pulled the door wide, and reaching in his arm, attempted to pull the warrior out into the corridor. Instead, the warrior pulled the guard into the cell and before the dazed man could utter a cry of protest, the knife had sealed his lips.

In a moment, the transfer of clothes was made; and Pepe, looking enough like the guard to be his twin, now leaned against the wall.

Now and then he would look toward the other guards, hidden from those in the cell by the bend in the corridor. Pepe wanted to be sure that there would be no prying eyes to see him release the prisoners.

Willis was always surprised by Pepe's cat-like moves when the man went into action. One second he was leaning against the wall; the next, he was at the door and it was swinging open. Slowly, one by one, the prisoners made their way out of the cell and down the corridor. They moved close beside the wall, making sure that none could observe them. When the last had stepped through, leaving only a shapeless mass in a corner of the cell, Pepe followed.

ONCE out of sight of the rest of the guards, Garcia started off at a run for the stairs leading upward to the temple. There he issued instructions to the warriors.

"Go to the armory and take up weapons. No one else must enter. Are there any of you here who knows the uses of the weapons there?"

Two men answered affirmatively.

"Good! If you are attacked, defend the armory until there is none of you left. And the last man . . . blast the room into bits with the guns. Even at the cost of his life if necessary."

They nodded soberly. But on each face was the determination to do as Garcia had commanded. Then, as they went down the stairs, Garcia, Willis and the rest went up.

"Unless Chitzl is a bigger fool than I think him to be, he will have all the entrances to the temple guarded," Garcia said, as they mounted the stairs. "I'm surprised that he hasn't posted guards on the stairs. But if we can get to the hall of the priests we will be safe, for a while. And perhaps gain some allies."

"How?"

"I was a priest once," was Garcia's surprising disclosure. "But because of my ability to get along with the various tribes of Indians and their dialects, Ticoma thought I would serve a more useful purpose outside Chihuatlan."

"Yeah," Willis said impatiently. He

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railed in silence at the habit this man and several of the others had of going off into discourses, when asked a direct question. "But how do we get these allies?" he asked again.

"They have a room there," Garcia said as though Willis had not spoken. "In that room are the robes the priests must wear during a ceremony such as will take place during this morning. I am certain that we can find robes to fit. What is more, I'm also certain that not all the priests have gone over to Chitzl."

He stopped in the sudden remembrance of an important thing.

"Pepe! The sacrificial knives."

"Aye," Pepe replied, eyes gleaming. "We can hide them under our robes."

"No, not you . . . or Porte. Both of you must get to the laboratory, where Porte must shut off the valves."

"But we shall be stopped," Pepe objected. "Porte is not dressed as I am."

Garcia smiled.

"That is right. And that is how you will succeed. You are *escorting* Porte to the laboratory on Chitzl's orders. He is a scientist who is to help the others."

Pepe was delighted with the plan. By this time they were at the turning in the corridor where the guards had originally taken them to the stairs leading to the cells. Pepe assumed a martial air and, with his sword point tickling Porte's back, started toward the elevator.

TWO guards were at the elevator entrance. They watched with bated breath as Pepe and the other approached. The guards stepped in front of the two and, after a second, one of them opened the elevator door and the four stepped within.

The corridor was now empty of guards.

Quickly, Garcia, Willis and Mike ran toward the room from which they'd followed Ticoma earlier in the evening. But Garcia swerved aside just before they reached it and leaped against a section of the wall to one side of the room. It swung inward and the three stepped inside.

It was a long chance which they took. For had the room been other than empty they would have had to explain their presence. But luckily it was empty. Upon racks attached to the walls were a number of robes, white with borders of purple around the throat and hem. They divested themselves of their clothes and put on the robes. Then Garcia opened a drawer set in a cupboard and pulled out three long-bladed knives. He handed one to Willis, one to Mike and stuck the third under his robe in the belt of his trousers. The other two followed suit. They looked at each other, grinning, when Willis noticed a discrepancy, one which could prove their undoing. Mike was of lighter complexion than Willis and Garcia.

"He'll just have to walk with his head down," Garcia said. "There will be so many of the priests there that I don't think any one will notice him."

"But if they do?" Willis asked.

"Then he will have to sacrifice himself to the benefit of the rest," Garcia replied.

Willis looked to Mike who returned his glance calmly.

"It's okay with me," he said.

Willis felt a tremendous wave of admiration for the Irishman. Sticking out a palm, Willis said:

"Mike, I don't know how things are going to turn out. But I want you to know, that whatever happens, I think you're a swell egg. Even though you've been giving me a song and dance about this whole business."

Mike grinned and replied:

"So you were wise to me?"

"Sure. Only I don't know what your game is."

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"Well, if we get out of this with a whole skin, I'll tell you," Mike promised.

And suddenly, with a startling, unnerving sound, there came a knock at the door.

JANE and Toclezuma watched with mixed feelings as the guards walked off with Willis and the others.

The girl was unmindful of her bleeding lip. Her whole being was centered on the departing figure of the man she loved.

Chitzl said: "You can stop thinking of him. By morning, he will be where the virgins are going."

The girl turned pale. She swayed, as if she was going to faint. Then recovering herself, she said:

"And is that how Chitzl expects to gain my affection?"

Chitzl's eyes gleamed oddly.

"You mean, if I let him free . . ."

"Let him free and I'm yours."

"Very well," Chitzl said gloatingly. "It's a—no!" he changed his mind. "They must die! And as for you, I will have you in any case."

The girl's shoulders slumped at his words. She had thought that her offer would not be refused. Chitzl turned abruptly to Toclezuma.

"As for you, priest, I am going to hold you to the oath you took. As high priest, it is your sworn duty to officiate at the sacrifice."

Toclezuma's eyes narrowed slightly at the words. The traitor had him there. He could not go back on the oath no matter . . . Then Toclezuma smiled.

"I shall offer the sacrifice," he replied.

"Then take him away," Chitzl shouted exultantly.

The guards, with Toclezuma between them, marched away.

Chitzl took Jane by the arm and led her in the direction of the inner court, saying:

"Come, my dear. Your handmaidens wait. You must prepare yourself for the great sacrifice to Momictlo. And to your marriage to me."

She moved at his side as an automaton, devoid of spirit and empty of face. Behind him, the guards had formed a column and were following at a respectful distance. Then they were in the great inner court of the temple, strangely deserted at a time when it should have been full of life and movement. Still holding Jane's arm, Chitzl led her down one of the forks which branched off to the women's quarters. Arriving before a great bronze door, he waited until someone answered the summons of his sword's hammering at its smooth front.

The door swung wide and a face showed through the crack, startled, young and frightened.

"I bring you Ixanthlu," Chitzl said roughly. "See to it that she is prepared for the ceremony."

The girl's eyes went even wider in fright. Then she slipped out, a slender, pale figure, little more than a child, and taking the dispirited Jane by the hand, led her into the room.

The door had hardly closed behind Chitzl, when Jane burst into a flood of tears. Her handmaiden led her to a divan in a corner of the room. At the sound of the sobbing girl, three other young women emerged from a drape-covered alcove.

They bathed her and annointed her with perfumed oils and bound her hair in a diadem of jewels set in solid gold. And upon her body they placed the robe whose jewels, set in the girdle and line of throat and hem, sparkled in the warm candlelight with a strange cold gleam. Upon her feet, they placed sandals of

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fine doeskin. And when they were done, they brought out a mirror and placed it in front of her.

JANE looked into the glass and shuddered at what the glass sent back in reflection. The girls looked at each other in surprise. For all thought that she was the most beautiful person their eyes had ever beheld. Then Jane said:

"Take it away, please." And lying down on the divan, she closed her eyes as if in sleep.

After a while there came a knock at the door. When it was opened, a file of priests entered the room. Leading the procession was Toclezuma.

His tall, lean figure was clothed in a robe of deep purple, in contrast to the white ones of the lesser priests. Around the coarse black hair was a circlet of solid gold. His features were set in lines of austerity and the ebony black eyes were more inscrutable than ever.

Jane's handmaidens made obeisance before the high priest. He paused in the center of the room and intoned:

"The sun is stirring in life, oh, most high born."

And the rest of the priests and the girls made answer:

"The sun is stirring in life."

"They wait, who with life give life."

And the response:

"They wait, who with life give life."

Then Toclezuma faced to the four corners of the room, bowing low as he did so and intoned each time:

"Each is a cornerstone erected that the whole day may endure forever. Let us sing the praises of the god."

This time there was no response. Instead, they all went to their knees, until Toclezuma faced the girl again. Then he went up to her and offering his arm, led her between the row of priests who fell in behind the two.

The procession filed out of the temple and down the long flight of stairs. At the foot of the stairs was assembled almost all the population of the city. At sight of the priest and the girl a long sigh—or, as it sounded to Jane, a sob—went out of the people. They opened their ranks to let the procession through, then followed at a respectful distance.

The way led upward, toward the highest terrace. And the narrow streets were lined with those who had not come to the temple to see the start of the procession. These in turn fell in behind the rest.

Presently they came to a vast open space, just below the highest terrace.

Here had been erected an immense altar.

Toclezuma waited until all the population had found space overlooking the altar. Beside him, the girl stared with eyes that were blank, unseeing in mental pain. Toclezuma stared at the throng for a moment, then turned his eyes to the stone ramparts which overlooked the altar. On every side were the warriors of Chitzl. Some there were who stood on the highest point. These held bow and arrows. Others were closer and were armed only with sword and buckler.

SILENCE fell upon the crowd as it waited for the ceremony to begin. Suddenly a great rent appeared in the mountain top. And mirrored in a huge reflector, the crowd saw the shape of the sun, its first rays ascending.

At this, Toclezuma stepped forward, Jane at his side. And from either side of the altar, six totally nude girls appeared.

As he and Jane mounted the six steps leading to the altar, the girls mounted a similar flight up the sides until they met in the center.

Here was drawn up a row of priests,

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completely surrounding the altar. One by one the girls stepped upon the twenty-foot flat slab that was the altar top. They stretched themselves out full length on the slab.

Now Toclezuma took Jane by the arm and escorted her to the altar top.

A hush of expectancy settled over the throng as he did so. Then, as Jane knelt at his feet, he raised his arms upward in dramatic gesture and said in tones loud enough to be heard by all:

"People of Chihuatlan! Hear me, your high priest. I have come before you, as a sign that the great day of sacrifice is begun. Here, seeking favor in the eyes of the great god, Momictli, are the twelve virgins of the sacrifice. And here, too, is Ixanthlu, the daughter of Montezuma.

"But the great god has spoken to me! He will not find favor in this sacrifice. No nor in any other! Not until the traitor Chitzl has been put to death. He has committed sacrilege against the god and against the people. And as a sign of his disfavor he has asked for a greater sacrifice."

Then Toclezuma stepped past the recumbent bodies of the girls until he stood in the very center of the altar. Taking a knife from inside his robe, he drew himself erect and, before the horrified eyes of the people, plunged it into his own breast!

A collective gasp of horror went up at the high priest's action. From the group of lesser priests around the altar, one sprang up the steps and ran to the center. Straddling the body of Toclezuma, the man shouted:

"Death to the traitor Chitzl! Death to all who stand with him."

Jane looked at the man, wide-eyed and unbelieving. For he was Garcia. And beside her Willis suddenly appeared also in the robes of a priest.

Then an arrow flashed in the sunlight and Garcia threw wide his hands and toppled across the body of Toclezuma.

AS THE sound of the knock at the door echoed through the room, Willis, Garcia and Mike looked at each other in dismay. Before they could answer, the door swung open and a small man appeared on the threshold. In a querulous voice he asked:

"Well now. How long does it take you to prepare yourselves?"

Softly, Garcia replied:

"In a moment. We are ready, now. I was but fastening the girdle of my robe."

But the little man was staring wide-eyed at Mike.

"You," he gasped, turning to leave—"you are not priests!"

Willis leaped forward, dragged him back into the room and slammed the door. Holding the frightened man upright, he pulled him to the center of the room.

The little man peered with frightened eyes at them. Then they went wide in recognition as he saw Garcia for the first time, clearly.

"You!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

And Garcia recognized the little man also.

"Quetzl-Ictli," he said. "Good. We are in luck," he continued as he turned to Willis and Mike in explanation. "This man is a friend of mine." Then a cloud shadowed his features.

"Or have you gone over to Chitzl?"

The little man, released by Willis, spat on the floor.

"That carrion," he said disgustedly. "There are some who have. But they are newcomers. Novices. I am a descendant of priests. My forefathers were priests. Do you think I hold fealty to such as that loud-voiced sword-wielder?"

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He spat again at the thought.

"Listen, then," Garcia said hurriedly. "We must get to the altar. Chitzl has seized power and is holding Toclezuma captive. It is our only chance to warn the people."

The little man bit his lips; then, his face clearing, he said:

"It can be done. I am in charge at the sacrifice. And so I name who shall be in attendance. But he—" pointing to Mike—"he would instantly give the whole thing away."

They stood silent for a few seconds in speculation, then the little man snapped his fingers and said:

"But why take him with us? He is perfectly safe here. No one will come here now."

Willis explained to Mike what the man had said and the other Irishman agreed to wait there for his friends to return.

They left the temple by a side door, thankful that there was no one to see them depart. In company with others, similarly dressed, they made their way to the huge altar set up in the center of the second highest terrace. Here, Quetzl-Ictli stationed them at the very top of the altar, with half a dozen others, to wait for the ceremony to begin.

Willis noticed the large number of warriors stationed about the place. He looked up and saw others ranging the ramparts above. And at the bottom, where the steps led up to the altar itself, were rows of warriors, swords drawn, lined up in such a manner that they faced the audience in every direction.

Then he saw a great crowd approaching, led by a man clad in a purple robe. When he came closer, Willis saw the girl at his side more distinctly. It was Jane! There was no doubt of it. And what made him positive it was she, was the robe she was wearing. It was the robe of Ixanthlu.

THEN at a whispered warning from their little friend, they faced the front of the altar. Garcia and Willis were placed in such a position that their backs were to the oncoming procession.

He saw Jane step upon the altar. Then he saw Toclezuma reach the stairs and ascend, heard the impassioned address the high priest gave, and watched horror-stricken as the rest, as the old man drew the knife and thrust it into his own breast.

On impulse, Willis turned and leaped to Jane's side.

CHAPTER IX

THE leader of the horsemen threw a leg across the saddle, a cloud of dust rising from his breeches as he did so, and with a groan leaped from his horse.

Turning to the three who rode beside him, he bawled:

"Torres! Damn your black soul! Get up here and tell them what we want!"

Gathered around them in silent wonder, was all the population of the very village where, a day and a half before, Willis and the others had stopped.

The one called Torres jumped from his horse and addressed the chief of the tribe:

"There were some who came to you hardly more than a day ago. They wanted burros and a guide to Chihuatlan."

The Indian looked with silent and inscrutable dignity at the stranger who demanded information. He shook his head and started away, but returned when Torres said:

"Wait! I am not asking whether they *were* here. I know!"

"Then if you know, go find them,"

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the chief said.

There was something evil in the way the dapper-looking sea captain looked at the chief.

"No," he answered softly. "We don't know where they are. We have come to you because you can lead us."

The chief shrugged and started away again.

"Listen to me, you stupid worm," Torres said. And the silk of his voice had taken on an edge of steel.

"What seems to be the trouble, Torres?" a petulant voice broke in.

Torres turned to confront Emilio Corta. The twin, despite the lines of fatigue in his face and the dusty appearance of his clothes, somehow looked as natty as ever. The points of his moustache stood erect as though just waxed, and the dusty breeches held a knife-edge crease.

In a low voice Torres explained the chief's lack of interest.

"I don't see how you could have forgotten the way," Corta said in reprimand.

"It has been more than two years since I was permitted to see Chihuatlan," Torres said. "And since then they have not allowed anyone to come to the city. I do remember that we came to this village and that we were given burros and guides through the mountain which leads into the hidden valley."

"Well then, offer the old man enough money . . . or tell him that if he doesn't guide us, we will wipe his stinking village off the earth."

Corta turned and, walking up to Blackie and the other man who had also dismounted, issued several orders in a low voice. Blackie, in turn, transmitted these orders to a squad of men, who dismounted and, with rifles ready, marched up and formed a line facing the villagers.

Torres gave Corta's ultimatum to the chief and a silence settled over the scene.

THE old man looked over the row of brutish-faced men, their faces reflecting indifference to the consequences of any act they might commit, and realized he had only a single choice. To submit, or to take the consequences of a refusal. And he had an idea what the latter might mean.

He turned and looked at the dozen mud huts that was his village. Behind him the entire tribe was assembled. He gave his people a searching glance, and although none could have guessed from their empty faces what these people were thinking, the old man knew. This had been their home for hundreds of years. What did Chihuatlan mean to them? The ways of the ancients were a lost memory to him. Better to go on living than to die a useless death.

"All of you want to go?" he asked.

"No," Corta said, when Torres had translated the question for him. "We'll leave a squad here as a guarantee of his good faith."

The chief agreed to Corta's demand. He looked at the horses Corta's motley crew were riding and asked:

"Mountain horses?"

Torres nodded.

"Good," the old man said. "We have only a few burros. Not enough for all these men."

The old man and four of the villagers acted as guides. They took the same path through the mountain as had Willis and the others, arriving at the hidden valley just as day broke. The long line of horsemen filed into the tunnel-like crevice.

Murmurs of fear and astonishment arose as the first ranks entered the wide and high walls of the tunnel. They crowded their horses close to each other,

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as if in the contact there would be a lessening of fear. At last they arrived at the huge mirror that stretched across the opening leading to the city.

Torres, in the lead by the side of the chief, turned in his saddle and called excitedly to Corta, directly behind him:

"This is it! Now I know how to enter."

The chief and the four others who had served as guides were drawn up to one side, waiting their dismissal. Corta looked at Torres, who returned the look with a peculiar smile. Then Corta gave an order to the first squad of horsemen. Raising their rifles, they sent a volley of shots into the bodies of the unsuspecting guides.

Corta turned away from the Indians sprawled in death on the tunnel floor and said:

"Are you sure, now, that you know?"

Torres was already at the side of the mirror. His hand reached into the hidden crevice and found the oddly-shaped mallet. Drawing it out, he held it triumphantly above him and said:

"I knew it! Although I'd forgotten the way, never could I forget what that old man who called himself Toclezuma did, once we got here."

Corta smiled broadly at his words.

"You are a clever rascal, Torres," he said. You must have been more than clever to have escaped detection all these years. They'd have boiled you in oil if they'd even suspected that you were working for me at the same time you were leading them to think you were with them."

Torres' laugh had a hollow ring. He inserted the mallet in the opening, turned it. The mirror rose on rails hidden in the rock of the tunnel-side, and the men rode into the last part of the tunnel. Then the second wall rose as Torres applied the mallet . . . and confronting them were four of the Aztec guard.

Torres had prepared his men for the appearance of such; and before the four could utter a sound, they fell pierced by the volley let loose at them from the rifles of Corta's men. Then they rode forward until they reached the head of the immense stairs leading to the temple. There, at a command from Corta, they set up their mortar and trained it on the city, half a mile away.

But something was going on below, something that compelled their attention. Things were too far away to be seen clearly, but it seemed to them that there was some sort of a battle taking place.

A GREAT shout of terror and anger was torn from the throats of the people, as they saw what had happened to Toclezuma and Garcia. Then, as someone in authority gave the word for indiscriminate firing on the part of the archers, the people broke in every direction. Some, in the excess of their anger, made for the guards at the foot of the altar. Made fearless by the murderous act committed by Chitzl's men, they wrested weapons from the guards and attacked them. But the archers took a heavy toll.

Madness or terror held the people in thrall. Some ran in the direction of whatever means of exit was handy—the street, their homes on the various terrace levels. Others, the more venturesome, made for the altar to help the priests who, enraged at the wanton shooting of Garcia and the helpless populace, were in hand-to-hand struggle with the guards.

Willis hesitated no longer. Springing to the side of the horror-stricken girl and holding her to him, he looked hastily about. A mob of men milled about on the altar above them. A solid phalanx of guards, led by Chitzl, were

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coming inexorably up the stairs. Turning, Willis made for the only open means of escape, the way back to the temple.

Here the crowd was at its densest. Men, frantic with the lust of battle or crazed with fear, shouldered them aside or ran wildly into them.

But Willis saw that this, despite the crowd, was their only sure way of escape from Chitzl and his minions. He turned back once and saw that the crowd in its mad milling had completely blocked the street behind them. He ran toward the temple with a wild surge of speed, Jane in his arms.

They passed priests hurrying to the conflict raging at the altar, and Willis saw that these men were armed. Some were buckling on swords, others had long bows slung over their shoulders, and in their hands were clutched arrows. They passed the two with unseeing eyes. Nor did Willis give them more than a cursory glance. For already the truncated shape of the temple was casting its shadow above them.

Shadow! Willis thought, startled. In this land of gloom and semi-darkness there were no shadows. Then he looked up and saw the most amazing thing his eyes had yet seen in this most amazing land.

AN ENTIRE section of the mountain side had slid back and the rays of the sun, streaming in, were reflecting from two immense mirrors stretched across the roof in such a manner that the rays were reflected down upon the altar. The whole scene of carnage and blood-lust was shown up in a garish, all-revealing light. It also disclosed to Willis something that lent wings to his already flying feet.

Chitzl had broken away from the mob and at the head of a large group of his men was hurrying toward the temple. Nor were they far behind Jane and Willis.

Willis ran lightly up the short flight of stairs to the inner hall of the priests and down the long, deserted corridor beyond. Thrusting the door open with a bang, he found Mike, sitting at his ease on a low stool. The Irishman looked up with startled eyes at the sudden invasion of his privacy. One look at the faces of Willis and Jane told him that all was not as it should be.

"What's wrong?" he asked, coming swiftly to his feet.

"Chitzl," Willis answered, even while he was rummaging through the pile of abandoned robes. "He's taken over," he continued as he slipped a robe over Jane's head. Then he stood away from her to observe how she looked. Her wealth of hair had been bound close to her head and unless someone looked closely he would see no difference between the girl and any of the priests.

Satisfied, Willis made for the door. The corridor beyond the room was deserted. They made the stairs and ran down them. Chitzl and his men were still not in sight. Ahead was the broad incline leading to the tunnel.

Then there came to there ears, with all the suddeness of a thunderclap, the sound of cannon fire. Before their dismayed eyes the entire top of the temple disintegrated into a mass of rubble. Again the thunderclap of a cannon's roar, and another cloud of dust and stone arose from the temple.

They looked up in the direction of the firing and saw, drawn up at the top of the tunnel where it began its slope into Chihuatlan, a large number of men. They were too far away to be observed with any degree of recognition. But both Willis and Mike were almost certain who was up there.

They turned in the direction of the city. Pandemonium reigned. Panic

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had taken hold of the populace—panic greater even than when Chitzl had given the order for his men to fire into the crowd. For then the arrows and swords were understandable factors. But this roaring, booming sound struck terror to the hearts of the people. Willis could see them running senselessly about in every direction, seeking safety where there was none to be had.

"Our only hope is the temple," said Jane, pulling at Willis' arm.

Mike turned and ran full after the others. Little eruptions of dust appeared on either side of them. Above the muted sounds of the people's shouts, they heard the unmistakable clatter of a machine gun. Nor was it a mystery at whom the gun was firing, for the spurts of dust were boundary lines between which they ran.

From the temple itself erupted a number of men, thus placing Willis' group between two fires.

There was no escape.

THE two men stood on either side of the girl and awaited the coming of the enemy. Chitzl, eyes aflame in the madness which battle brings, reached them first. Straight as an arrow, he went for the girl. But before he reached her, Willis stood in his path. For a second the two confronted each other, then Willis spoke:

"Wait, man! This isn't the time for quarrels. Those men up there are our enemies. Yours and mine. Damnit, they'll kill all of us! We've got to get her to safety."

A tight smile ringed Chitzl's mouth.

"So they are enemies, eh? I can see that, fool. But as you say, our quarrel can wait. Back to the temple, then. There are weapons there which will make theirs look like toys."

Chitzl turned and started back, the rest following. Before Willis and Mike could take more than a few steps, they were ringed about by a dozen men who struck them down before they could lift a finger to defend themselves.

HERNANDO CORTA, eyes narrowed against the searchlight glare thrown by the leading scout car, spoke to the only civilian in the car:

"You've got to be sure, Doctor. All of Mexico may depend for its safety on whether what you have told me is true."

Doctor Lorenz, looking as fussy as ever, turned to Corta and said:

"Of course I'm certain! Further, Senor Zamanta can bear me out in my assertion that the robe of Ixanthlu bears upon the center jewel of its girdle a map of hidden Chihuatlan. More, we know the reason, now, why your brother is so interested in the Aztecs.

"Before we went to that detective, Willis, we had a photostat made of the robe. We wanted the robe returned because, outside of the National Museum in Mexico City, ours was the only museum in the world to have a complete historical exhibit of the Aztecs. And with the robe in our possession, we would have that which no other museum had.

"Then, as I told you in Mexico City, we returned from our visit to Willis and found that it had all been a mistake. The man in charge of the exhibit, had mistakenly switched the two robes. The replica we had made as insurance against theft, was the one which had been placed in the vault. And Smith, during the excitement of the theft, had not noticed the substitution.

"Of course it was only natural that we assumed that he had taken the original. But the very next morning, after our visit to Willis, one of the directors, an expert in jewels, in looking over what we thought was the replica, saw that the emeralds of the girdle were genuine.

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Therefore the robe was genuine. For certainly we didn't contract for emeralds in the replica.

"Then, as he continued his examination, he came across that which brought me to Mexico and Senor Zamanta. The clasp holding the center jewel, was made from a pair of smaller emeralds. And on these were heiroglyphics such as we could not decipher. The only man who could do so was Zamanta.

"You know the rest. Those jewels bore a diagram which showed that in the city of Chihuatlan, and in the mountain itself, was a gigantic store of what we think is pure radium. And that somehow, those ancient scientists had managed to harness the radio-active element. If so, the riddle of how they managed to construct the tremendous things they did, would be solved."

Corta had listened with tight-mouthed, sober-eyed expression to Lorenz' story.

"Yes," he said in a musing tone, as though he was talking to himself. "We were all pieces of a puzzle. A jig-saw puzzle. And then we stepped forward at the proper time and were neatly laid in our proper places."

He sighed at the way fate had arranged things. At the blood which had been let because of one man's ambition. And that man was his own twin.

Behind them, he could hear the rumble of a dozen tanks. When the sun arose, he knew also, a fleet of bombers would be overhead. Already the first rays of the dawning sun was striking the pinnacle of the high peak ahead.

Not long, now, he thought.

HE BECAME aware of the curious look Lorenz had sent his way.

"Forgive me, Doctor," he said in apology. "I was thinking how fate tricks those whom first she must favor before she would destroy. Somewhere in the range ahead is my brother. He has plotted a whole lifetime for this moment. He is going to destroy a whole country if he succeeds. Nor does he know that vengeance and retribution is on its way. I was thinking how like a puzzle all this has been.

"An archeologist finds a robe in an obscure Mexican village. A private detective in Chicago is retained by a museum to find this robe. A sea captain who was once an Aztec warrior becomes a spy for the most nefarious organization in the world, and tells the head of that organization that there is a woman who, if she were taken captive, would serve their purpose to greater advantage.

"A civilization within the burrowed fastness of a mountain awaits the arrival of this girl, to start a revival of the ancient days.

"And look how well it might have succeeded. Emilio went to Chicago and contacted Willis. He didn't mention the robe. No, he wanted Willis to find a girl, one Jane Smith. He didn't know that only a short time before the Kincaid Museum had also retained this man's services. So he offers this man a larger fee if he brings the girl to a certain address in Mexico City. My address! And why mine? Because, knowing that this man was famous for his love of money, he would bend every effort toward finding this girl. I am only speculating on what he had planned here. But I can be reasonably certain of his thoughts.

"He had men stationed at the airport and the railroad station. If Willis succeeded in finding the girl, then Emilio would know when he arrived in the city. Then—and this I know—he planned to kidnap the girl from my home, and in such a way that the fact became known that she had been there. Of course you realize the consequences of such an in-

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cident? The daughter of Montezuma, prisoner in my home!"

"One moment, Senor Corta," Lorenz interrupted. "How do you know all these things?"

"Like my brother," Corta explained, "I, too, have means of getting information. We have a secret service as excellent as that of the United States. Juan Torres was employed by me as a captain on one of my oil tankers. At the same time he was employed by my brother. One of our agents learned of his Aztec ancestry. As I have said, there was another movement afoot besides Emilio's. The Aztec movement. And at the same time Torres was serving me, he was also in the service of the other two. He sold out to the highest bidder—my brother. It was he who told of Miss Smith. And when Willis was kidnaped, he was brought on board the Tlaxco, Torres' boat.

"So Emilio learned that Willis had failed and that Jane was either already in the country or about to enter. For it was she who had Willis kidnaped, and left instructions for him to seek someone in Vera Cruz, the ship's port of call. So Torres relayed the information to Emilio.

"When Willis came to me, he accused me of double dealing. But he found Mike Hearn there, on his arrival. And Mike had been with Willis when they were attacked by Emilio and his gang. He had heard Willis accuse Emilio of double dealing. So, because of what he was, he had known what had happened. He told me to act as though I were the one who had approached him in Chicago."

"Who is this man Hearn who seems to be a prime factor in all this?" Lorenz asked.

CORTA answered immediately but his attention was centered on the scout car which a few minutes before had disappeared over the crest of a ridge. It was now racing back toward them at full speed.

"He is a member of the policing body of the Pan-American Council. An investigator, in other words. Most of his work has to do with subversive activities . . ."

The scout car pulled alongside with a screeching of brakes and almost ended up by skidding into the ditch at the side of the road. A young lieutenant stuck his head out of the car and said something to Corta.

Then the sergeant driving the small car reversed it and went back up the ridge, followed closely by the staff car. When they arrived on the crest, Lorenz saw what had made the lieutenant so excited.

Below them, and somewhat to the right, was a barren-topped mountain. Before their eyes, the entire top of the mountain was opening, like an orange cut in two. When the opening reached its greatest width, they saw that it was more than a hundred yards across. And streaming up from the inside of the mountain was the reflection of the sun.

They were struck silent by the strange phenomena. But not for long. Corta gave an order to his chauffeur, who spoke into a microphone. Lorenz saw then, that their car was equipped with a two-way transmission set.

Immediately, the entire cavalcade of motor trucks, tanks, the two batteries of artillery and mortars deployed across the level space on which they had finally found room to maneuver. A small truck raced up and parked beside the staff car. Within it was a highly complicated transmission set.

General Gonzales stepped out of the staff car and walked over to the radio truck. With him went an aide. Corta and Lorenz followed the General, but

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stood to one side.

Corta seemed to have forgotten the very existence of Lorenz. He kept looking up as if expecting to find something of good omen in the blue above. Then Lorenz heard the sound of many motors and knew what Corta was looking for. In a few seconds, three squadrons of four-motored bombers streaked across the sky. There were six planes in each group.

Corta outlined their entire campaign in a few sentences.

"All this was planned months ago. But until you brought the map which showed how we were to reach Chihuatlan, we were stymied. There was such a city; we knew that. But its location was a mystery to us. Our ablest operatives were never able to find the smallest clue to its existence.

"The council has given me authority to wage war against them. It must be a war of annihilation. The safety of the country demands they be wiped out. That is why I am going to use planes and heavy artillery. There below us, beneath the crust of that mountain top, is the city. At a given signal, the bombers will unload their bombs and the artillery will fire its charges into that opening. If that does not succeed, I will send the infantry in to clean up."

General Gonzales waved a hand for Corta and Lorenz to come over to the truck.

"Everything is in readiness," he said. "You can give the signal whenever you wish."

CHAPTER X

THROUGH a haze of pain, Willis heard the voice. Then several pairs of arms took hold of him and pulled him up, where he hung suspended, like a huge rag doll, in the arms of one of the men.

Blood seeped in a slow stream from a cut on his forehead. Emilio Corta regarded Willis with a profound look of distaste. Blackie, in whose arms Willis hung, was grinning broadly.

"Some dick you hired," he said.

"Never mind that," Corta said softly. "He served his purpose. What about the other?"

Torres, standing beside the leader of the Pan-Archistas, stepped forward and nudged the unconscious body of Mike with his foot. A groan came from Mike.

"He's alive."

"Drag them into the temple," Corta commanded.

The steps of the temple ran red with the blood of priest and warrior who had given up their lives in the defense of the sacred precincts. Standing guard at the entrance were a number of Corta's gang of ruffians, and posted in such a way as to command the space in front of the temple, was a machine gun.

Several men stepped forward and relieved Blackie of his burden. Mike, too, was dragged along, the toes of his boots making parallel lines in the dust.

Willis opened his eyes just as they came into the temple. Ahead of him marched the short, slender figure of Torres and the taller, thicker figure of Blackie, with Corta between them.

It was strange, this business of floating along. How was he doing it? Then he felt the hands holding his arms and full consciousness returned to him. Bracing his legs, he drew his captors to a temporary halt.

"I can make it without help," Willis snarled, shrugging himself loose from their grasp.

His mind was functioning normally again. Dimly to his ears there came the sound of a machine gun's chatter. Some of Corta's mob cleaning up, he thought. He saw that Torres was in the lead now. Straight to Ticoma's room

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they marched. Then Willis was facing the three men.

Blackie walked up to Willis, and saying: "Didn't I tell you to keep your nose clean?" hit at him with his fist.

At the last instant before contact, Willis jerked his head aside, the fist sliding harmlessly past his head. At the same time Willis threw a short right to Blackie's chin and the man went down as though poleaxed.

One of the guards struck Willis from behind, and he went to his knees from the blow. Before he could rise Blackie kicked him in the jaw.

Willis was sent backwards, pinwheels of light set off in his brain by the kick. More by reflex than with a consciousness of what he was doing, Willis staggered upright again. Blackie, a lump at the side of his jaw where Willis' fist had connected, was set to deliver another blow, but Corta told him to hold off.

"Later," Corta promised. "First I've got to find the girl."

WILLIS stood there, swaying back and forth, his eyes squinting with pain in his efforts to see clearly.

Corta said:

"We don't have much time, my friend. Where's the girl?"

The word "girl" cleared Willis' brain as if by magic.

"Chitzl! He has her!" Willis shouted.

Torres stepped forward, his brow knit in thought.

"Did you say Chitzl?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Hell!" Torrest swore. He turned to Corta in explanation. "He's head of the warriors here. And that damned idiot will——Corta," his voice rang with sudden emotion.

Corta froze at the horror in the man's voice.

"What is it? *What is wrong?*"

Torres' skin, brown by nature, had turned a sickly yellow. His breath whistled in his throat.

"What time is it?" he gasped.

Corta looked at him, dumfounded.

But the very urgency in the man's manner dictated a reply. Corta looked at his wrist watch.

"It is almost ten," he said.

Torres' eyes narrowed.

"We have a chance," he muttered. "At a certain time in the morning sun's rays strike the mirror on the side of the hill and reflect downward against the altar. The Aztecs have some sort of a gadget which is set off and the altar opens wide so that the virgins who have been sacrificed will slide down into Momictli's pit. If I know that bloody fool, he's going to try to appease the god . . . by sacrificing the girl!"

Willis had taken blows, disappointments and hardships enough for a dozen men. But this was something which made his heart sink and his senses reel.

"Come on then," he begged frantically. "There isn't much time."

But it wasn't the factor of the girl's safety which made Corta give the command to the rescue.

"Was she wearing the robe?" he asked Willis.

Willis nodded dumbly.

Torres spun on his heels and started at a run for the temple entrance which led to the streets. Behind him their quarrels forgotten for the moment, came Willis, Corta and Blackie. None noticed that Mike was no longer with them.

The streets were deserted and silent. The houses seemed emptied of life. There were only two score rifle-armed men running as if the devil were at their heels. But ahead, Willis saw the fringe of a huge crowd of people. They were spread over the stepped terraces. And at the topmost point he could see

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a solid wall of them.

Then they were on the lowest terrace. And Willis saw with a clarity that which froze him to his soul, the reason for the gathering of people.

STANDING on the altar top, the robe of the feathered serpent gleaming in the sun's rays and clothing her in an aura of supernatural light, was Jane. Beside her stood Chitzl. They were facing each other. Chitzl turned from her and said something which sent a murmur which deepened into a roar of approval from the crowd; then he turned back to her again.

The four, Willis, Corta, Torres and Blackie were watching the strange and compelling ceremony with bated breath. They seemed rooted to the spot. It was Chitzl who broke the spell. Pulling his short sword from its scabbard, he raised it high over his head.

Standing at Willis' side was one of Corta's men, eyes lost in what was going on above them. Before the man knew what had happened, Willis snatched the rifle from his lax fingers and had it against his shoulder. It spoke once. And a messenger of death went winging across space to find lodgement in Chitzl's breast.

There was a second of awed astonishment. Then with an inarticulate, wordless cry, the people broke and ran in every direction. And on the altar top there now stood but one figure.

Jane Smith.

Even as Willis and the rest made for the altar at a run, they heard the sound of gears meshing with a rusty sound, as though they had not been put to work in a long time and were squealing in protest. Willis saw Jane sway on the altar top. Then, before his very eyes, she disappeared from view.

"Momictli!" Torres gasped.

But Willis didn't hear him. He was already on the bottom step, moving toward the altar itself. Then he was standing on a ledge, six inches wide, and looking down at ten whitened fingers frantically holding to the edge of the altar. He flung himself forward and closed strong fingers about Jane's wrists, just as her fingers gave way.

He hoisted her to the ledge beside him and, carefully they backed away. Backed away because they had seen the nightmare of horror below.

Willis held the girl tightly to him, pressing her face to his shoulder, shutting from her eyes what they had seen. Below the altar, hundreds of feet down a shaft smooth and slimy as a snake's belly, was a pit. On the bottom of that pit was what the people of Chihuatlan called Momictli.

Willis had seen it but for the barest second. But that single glance was graven in his memory forever.

A monster lay below. Something which had survived the blasts of time; something which made the senses stir in nameless horror.

It lay curled at the bottom. There, the pit widened out until it was fully a hundred feet across. Yet it was not wide enough to accommodate the entire *thing*. Along its back, like the serrated ridge of a mountain chain, was a bony series of projections. It had a head perhaps twenty feet long and shaped somewhat like an alligator's. And when the light struck it, it raised that head and Willis saw the mouth open and the triple rows of teeth, each the size of a boulder. And from its throat, *steam* rose!

STILL holding her pressed close to him, Willis and the girl walked down the steps to those waiting below. She was shaking as if with fever. He was whispering soothing words in her ear. Neither were aware of the men

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awaiting for them.

Suddenly she was jerked from his arms. Facing him were a score of men, rifles leveled at his chest, in their eyes the cold, indifferent expression of those about to act as executioners. Stunned, Willis looked to where Jane was. Corta stood in front of her, his eyes riveted on the girdle of jewels about the robe. Willis saw his throat working in spasms, as if at that moment he was finding difficulty in swallowing. Slowly he reached clawing fingers toward the girdle. And slowly, the girl backed away from him until at last she could go no farther. For she had backed within the circle of Blackie's arms. Corta moved toward her with the slow, hypnotizing movement of a snake about to strike. And then his fingers were on the belt!

The concussion threw them all to the ground!

A series of terrifying sounds and earthquake noises filled the cavern. Willis looked up in time to see half a dozen silver-colored cylinders streak through the opening in the mountain top and there was another series of explosions.

The ground shook in convulsions. Dust rose in breath-choking clouds. Willis tried to gain his feet, but the ground beneath him quivered as if it were water. There was a sudden, *whooshing* scream and the tremendous mirror shattered into bits, as a high explosive shell struck its surface. Then more bombs streaked through the opening and this time struck near the altar. As if by magic, the ground split wide open like a gourd and a cloud of steam arose.

And at that, Willis got to his feet. Bent low, like a football player intent on a touchdown, he ran to where Jane lay beside Corta, Torres and Blackie. She, as well as they, was trying to get to her feet. He scooped her up just as a hand fastened around his ankle. Whirling on one foot like a dancer, Willis kicked hard at Blackie's jaw. Blackie released his grip with a sigh.

Then, half at a trot and half dragging the stunned girl, Willis made for the temple. Somewhere in it were Pepe and Garcia's assistant. They were their only hope. Behind them, more bombs and shells fell, creating an inferno of sound and smell. He looked around once and what he saw spurred him to superhuman effort. Behind him, only a hundred yards and gaining swiftly, were Corta and the others.

The temple steps were just ahead, and from it emerged Mike, Pepe and the photographer's assistant. Each held an oddly shaped weapon. They brought the weapons to their shoulders and puffs of white smoke eddied from the muzzles. Behind them Willis heard men scream. There were no other sounds. Just the white smoke and the answering sound of men in pain or giving voice to that final call to death.

Suddenly, above the sound of the shells and the bombs, there came another sound. An inhuman sound. A wail—a scream—a screech, as of a thousand locomotive whistles let loose at once. Willis saw the three men on the temple steps look up, beyond and behind him. A silence descended, as if at that moment something more important than bombs was in order. Then there was that ear-splitting cry again.

Willis followed the direction of the others' gaze and felt the hair at his nape rise. Up above, close to the very roof top, circled the monster. Willis saw then that the monster from the pit had wings! Wings which spread like those of a huge plane, and gleamed with some irridescent material. Jeweled feathers! *The feathered serpent!*

ABRUPTLY, the monster swooped down in an awe-inspiring dive,

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straight for those on the temple steps. They were held, riveted to the spot. Then Corta and the rest broke with screams of terror. With a speed that was amazing in so large an animal, the monster changed his direction and shot down toward the fleeing men. The gigantic jaws opened and, before the horror-stricken eyes of Willis and the rest, scooped up within the shovel of its jaws the bodies of Blackie and Torres. For the barest second they hung suspended, two limp rag dolls, from between the great jaws. They they disappeared down the maw of the animal as it flew away.

Corta went mad then! Cradling the rifle he carried against his hip, he sent shot after shot into the group on the stairs. His action was so unexpected that it caught them flatfooted. The photographer's assistant sank to the ground, killed instantly. Willis felt a burning sensation in his shoulder and a wetness ran down his arm. He saw Mike stagger, then recover; saw him raise the weapon he carried to his shoulder. There was a small cloud of smoke . . . and Corta sank to the ground, his entire chest burned through by the mysterious explosive charge from Mike's gun.

The madness which had seized Corta was infectious. The twenty or so men who had followed him to the temple, spectators to the tragedy, now began to blaze away at Willis and the rest, but wildly and without aim, as if in their excess of madness the firing of the rifles sufficed. Bullets ricochetted off the steps and whined away. Pepe and Mike, carefully and calmly, as though shooting at clay pigeons, swept the muzzles of their weapons about in a semi-circle, and the firing died as abruptly as it had begun.

Again there came that hissing sound. Only this time it was muted, for the shells had begun to fall again. Willis and the girl, on the steps now beside Mike and Pepe, turned to watch the approach of the monster. Suddenly Mike staggered.

"Here," he gasped, thrusting the rifle into Willis' hand. "I'm shot. Get that damned thing!"

The wetness running down Willis' arm was a living thing, his life's blood. Already he felt weak from the loss of it. The gun almost slipped from his nerveless fingers; but before it quite fell, Jane had it and had turned to face the diving monster. Simultaneously, she and Pepe pulled their triggers. Still the monster came on. Smoke eddied and curled from the muzzles. They could see the scorched areas on the monster's body where the projectiles had struck. Still it came on! But now it was a lifeless thing for there was no direction in its dive. It crashed to the street, one wing striking the side of the temple crushing in a wall as if it were an egg shell. A horrible rotting stench arose from the dead thing.

Above everything rose a cataclysmic roar as a geyser of stem and smoke arose from the streets beyond, not far from the terrace on which the altar had stood. A huge column of flame shot skyward. Pepe shouted:

"Volcano! Come quick!"

TURNING, the four dashed madly down the corridor and into Ticoma's room and beyond it to where the doors to the decompression chamber still stood wide. They piled in and Pepe jerked at the controling lever. There was that sinking feeling, then Pepe jerked the door open and they staggered into the laboratory. The floor was quivering like a live thing. The benches at which the technicians had been working were empty now. But the group gave their surroundings only a passing glance. On they went, into a little

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room. A little room in which there were several complicated-looking machines. There was a burned smell in the air, as of exploded cordite.

"The shut-off valves," Pepe said as he turned a wheel set against the wall. He used both hands in the doing. "Lava no can get out now. But for this place, he leave open. Show me this wheel and say, turn it. Secret tunnel."

As though his words were the abracadabra needed, a whole section of the wall slid open, revealing the gloom of a dimly lighted tunnel. Then there was a tremendous roar and the door through which they had entered billowed inward. Smoke curled under the cracks and an impossible heat arose from the outside. Then they were through the wall section and it closed behind them as though operated by a secret eye.

HERNANDO CORTA'S hand swept downward, and the crash of artillery salvoes died away. Doctor Lorenz, half deafened by the sounds, looked at him questioningly.

"We will wait ten minutes," Corta said. "Then I will send the troops down."

Suddenly the ground trembled at their feet and from the huge vent in the mountain top a geyser of smoke shot out. The rumble of an earthquake was felt. Corta acted instantly. Shooting rapid-fire orders to the radio man, he turned and ran for the staff car, Lorenz at his heels. In a matter of minutes the whole armored division was on its way to safety.

The staff car was in the lead. Corta, lost in the wonder of what had happened, almost passed the four people who had suddenly appeared at the side of the road. Clapping a hand to the driver's shoulder, he commanded him to stop. For in that instant, he had recognized Willis and Hearn.

"AMAZING!" cried Doctor Lorenz when Willis finished telling of their adventures. "Unbelievable."

"And so Emilio is dead," mused Hernando Corta. "It is best so. And what happened to the rest of them . . ."

There was no need for an answer.

Willis turned to Mike, propped up in a corner where the doctor, Corta, had placed him.

"And you, Mike. What was your part in all this?"

"Might as well start at the beginning," Mike said. "Radium! That was what they were after. And the process by which they transformed it into active energy. Torres was the one who told Emilio Corta of it. He had gone into hiding at the end of the last war because we were still looking for him. Unexpectedly there was a series of uprisings in Mexico, behind it this new group, the Pan-Archistas.

"Torres knew of the robe of Ixanthlu, as well as of Professor Smith and his daughter's discovery of the robe. I'm not certain but that he must have overheard someone relate that on the girdle of the robe was the engraving which was a map. He told Corta, and Corta came to you after he had been to the rooming house and killed the woman.

"Then I met you on the boat. The rest you know. As for the radium, when I reported to the Pan-American Council that there was a hidden store of radium in Mexico, I was commissioned to find it. And that's where I came in."

"By the way, Doctor Lorenz," Willis said. "I think I have some money coming. The robe, you know."

Lorenz nodded, smiling. "That's right. Five thousand dollars."

Willis turned to Jane and, cupping her chin in his fingers, said:

"After all, dear. We'll need some money for our honeymoon."

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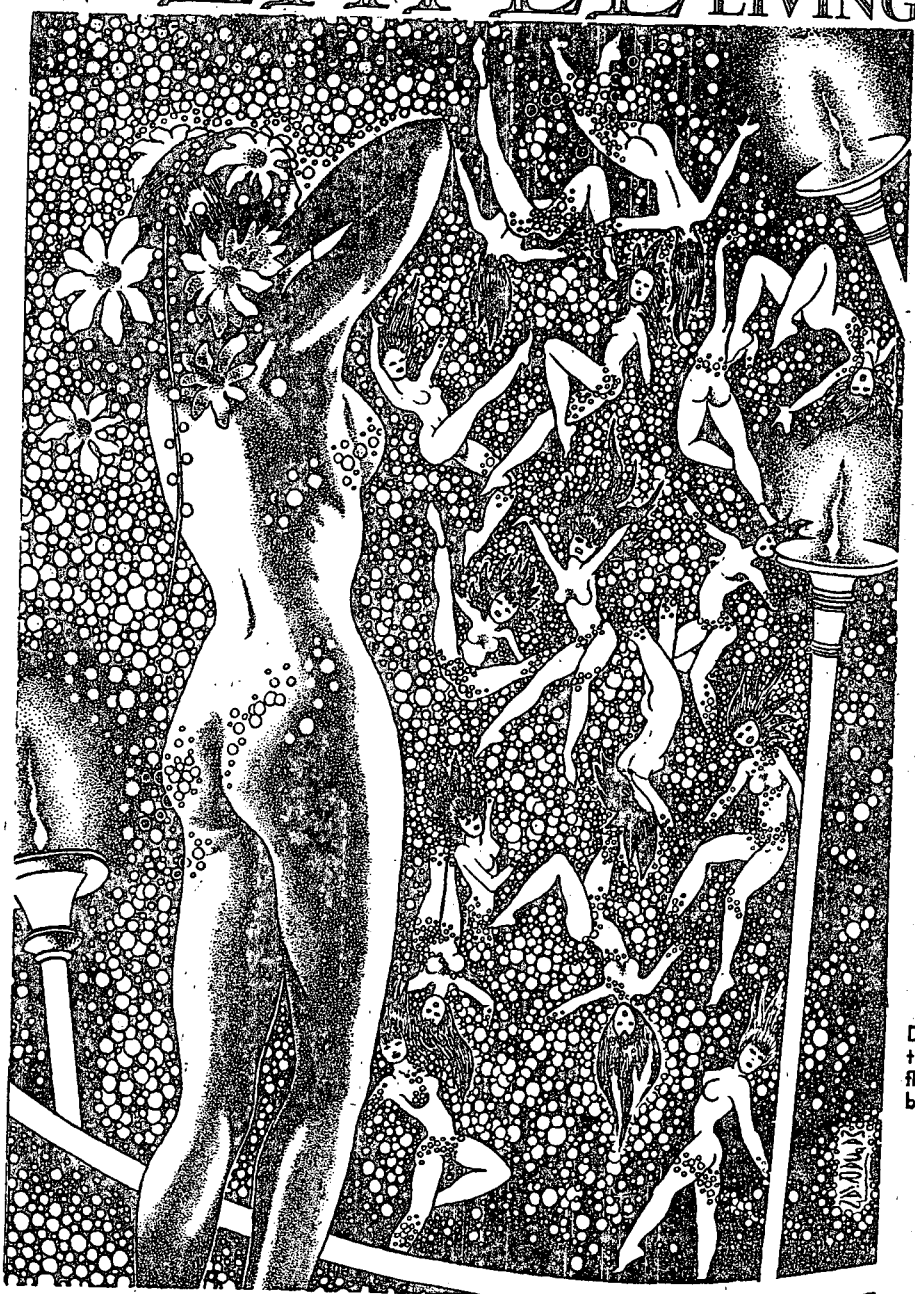
THE LOTUS TEMPLE

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON



Down from the theater arch floated girls by the score!

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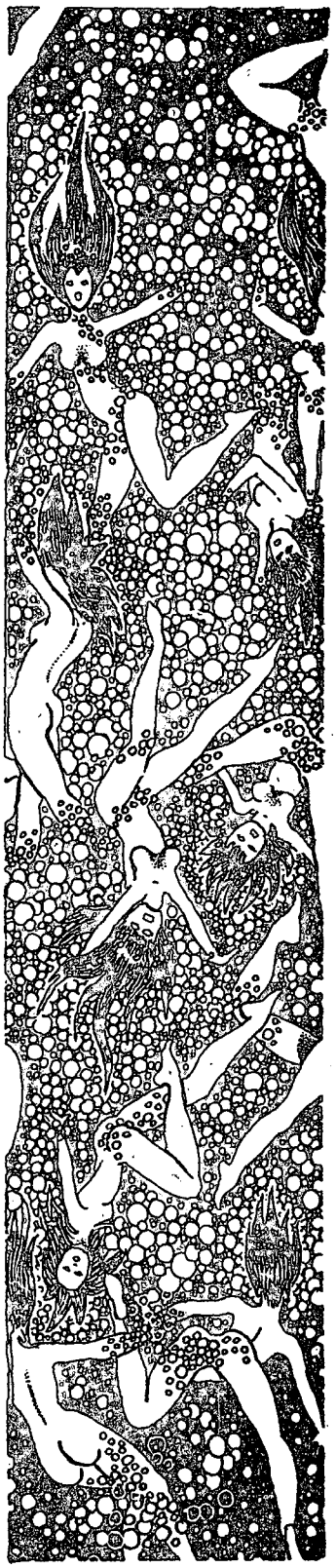
Cokie was eager to get "out of this world." But the fourth dimension was no improvement.



"HOW'S the roast beef today, Charley?" Charley Borsh, the proprietor of the Chicago Coffee Shop, looked down at the questioner from his superior height. The glance, from under the steel rimmed glasses he wore, held a great pity. His voice matched the glance.

"What a question!" he snarled. "'How's the roast beef?' Did you ever get a sandwich here that wasn't the best? Of course not!" he answered his own question and went on. "Now, what do you want it on—white or rye?"

"Cokie" Mokey hesitated for several seconds, then said:

"Make it rye, Charley."

He got a cup of coffee with the sandwich and shuffled over to a table, his feet scraping across the tile floor. But no one paid any attention to his small, shabbily dressed figure, huddled over his sandwich and coffee as though he was warming himself over a fire.

The door to the tavern slammed open with a crash which threatened to shatter all the glass in it; and Finnegan, the traffic cop barged in. He leaned over the glass-enclosed steam table and asked Charley:

"Where's Cokie?"

Charley asked curiously:

"Why?"

"Because that dope gave me the double at Sportsman's today. And it paid off to the limit." He paused dramatically for a few seconds, then announced, matter-of-factly: "I had two bucks on it."

"Holy smoke! Then you got two hundred bucks!"

"That's right Charley. Just because I took Cokie's hunch, or dream, or whatever it was that made him give those horses. By the way, is he here?"

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"Yep. Over there in the corner."

Finnegan walked over to where Cokie was sitting and, slapping him on the back, said:

"Cokie, that double came in. And just to show you I'm a right guy—here."

Cokie looked at Finnegan, then looked down at the table, where two crisp new ten-dollar bills were lying beside the coffee cup.

"Wh—what's this?" he asked.

"That's for you, dope." Finnegan said. "For the tip."

Cokie's lips moved but nothing came out.

Finnegan laughed and said:

"Go ahead, take 'em. They're real, and they're yours. And f'r gosh sakes go and get yourself a haircut. It's been six months since you had that mop clipped."

"Thanks, Finnegan," Cokie whispered, then realizing what the twenty dollars could bring, said, "man, now I can get——"

Finnegan's big hand closed around the thinly clad, skiny shoulder.

"Yeah," he interrupted Cokie's daydream, "get what? Some of that happy dust you use. Well get this, you dopey jerk: if I catch you with any of that stuff, I'll throw you so far into a cell, they'll think you're part of the wall!"

"Okay, okay, Finnegan," Cokie said hastily. "All I was going to say was, now I can get a haircut. That's all."

"So get going," Finnegan said as he lifted Cokie from the stool, "Fernando's not busy, now."

COKIE walked hesitantly down the short flight of stairs, which led to Fernando's barber shop. He half-hoped Fernando was busy. Cokie didn't like getting haircuts. And, too, he didn't like Fernando's. Many of the barber's customers knew him and ribbed him unmercifully on those occasions when he came in. Cokie was out of luck. Fernando's chair was empty. And the other two barbers had customers.

He had no sooner stretched himself out in Fernando's chair, than the barber started in on him. As Fernando began to comb the unruly mop of Cokie's hair, he whispered in a conspiritorial voice:

"Say, keed, I hear you no can get thees stuff what meks you heppy?"

Cokie mumbled a something which sounded like, "Yah, 's tough."

"So, what you goin' do?"

Cokie shrugged his shoulders.

Fernando, his slim figure perched on one leg, the other braced against the chair, looked like a mustached malicious bird, as he bent close to his work.

"Look, keed," he said "I like you. So I'm going geeve you teep. Is a new place open up, not far from here."

Saliva flooded Cokie's mouth. He became aware of every nerve in his body. If only Fernando wasn't kidding. He could use some stuff. Right now! But he didn't see the barber wink to the others in the shop.

"Sure, keed," Fernando continued to whisper, "is not far. Joost aroun' da corner, on Von Buren. Opstairs over candy store."

"Ya sure, Ferdy?" Cokie asked in a tremulous whisper.

"Posateeve! You go there, no?"

"Right over the candy store?"

"Dat's eet."

"Okay!"

Cokie didn't hear the outburst of laughter which followed his departure. Nor did he hear Fernando gleefully announce:

"Ees a good joke, no? Dat's where dat old Syrian got his place. You know—one we call Old Joe. Soopose to mek new perfume from fancy flower."

Someone asked:

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"Cokie isn't that dumb. What makes you think he's going to be fooled?"

"Hah! You see how dat Syrian dresses? In dose fancy dress-like what you call—uh—magician," Fernando explained.

COKIE walked up dark narrow winding stairs which led to the old Syrian's perfumery. He was confronted by a blank frosted-glass door. Unhesitantly he opened it. The tinkle of a bell sounded somewhere behind the dark wood partition which separated the anteroom of the office from the rear.

Cokie's eyes and mouth opened wide as he looked fearfully about the bare place. He didn't know why he had suddenly become afraid. But there was something strangely disquieting about the place. As though there were dark and horrible secrets to be found behind the black-faced partitions.

A door opened and a tall, slender man came into the room. A heavy odor followed him and seemed to cling to him as he came over to Cokie. The dark man looked Cokie over as carefully and as distastefully as though the snowbird were an insect under a microscope.

"Yes?" he asked shortly.

Cokie felt an overpowering desire to get out of there. Not even bother to answer questions. Just scram! But instinct and fear were submerged in the greater desire for that which was making every nerve in his body scream aloud. Whenever Cokie became frightened or embarrassed, his vocal cords refused to articulate clearly. And now he mumbled something which sounded like:

"Told to—here—and nerve—ana ——"

The dark-skinned man picked up a single thing from the jumble of sounds escaping from Cokie's lips. "Nerve—ana."

"So!" he softly said, "Thou desirest Nirvana?"

Cokie thought that was the name of the narcotic. He nodded his head dumbly.

"Follow me, then," the dark one said. He turned abruptly and went back through the door from which he had come. Cokie followed.

Strange odors assailed his nose; strange sighing sounds, his ears. It was a long, narrow passage through which they walked. Doors were set at regular intervals along the passage. The sounds and odors came from behind these doors.

Suddenly they were out of the semi-gloom of the passage and into the strangest room Cokie had ever seen. The room seemed to shimmer in a queer soft light. Yet, look where he would, Cokie couldn't find the source of this strange light. He gazed in wide-eyed wonder at the walls of the room. All four walls were covered with huge tapestries, which hung from ceiling to floor. And all the tapestries had the same pattern: hundreds of naked female figures, in strangely contorted positions.

Cokie's guide came to the center of the room and, in a low sing-song voice, began to talk. Cokie didn't understand anything he was saying, because it wasn't in English. Cokie had been plenty frightened before, but this was even more so. Because there were only two of them in this room and the dark-faced man was talking to *somebody!* For after every few words he'd make a little bow; first to one wall, then to another, until he'd bowed to all four walls. Then, with head back and eyes closed, he stopped talking.

Sweat began to run down Cokie's face and neck. It made him itch, as though a thousand lice had gone to work on him. Bue he was too terror-stricken to move. For, without warning and as

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though in answer to the dark one's talking, the soft light had disappeared. Darkness! A darkness, deeper, more terrifying than anything Cokie had ever known. Now the darkness was pierced by a glow of light. First Cokie saw only the light. Then he saw the *face* above the light. His lips grimaced horribly. The muscles in his throat did their utmost to force out the scream which had come up from his belly. But only silence followed the revealing of the face, by the light.

Cokie had never seen such a face! Dark and long, it had at one end a short, two-pronged beard and at the other, a turban. And in between, a pair of narrow malignant black eyes; a nose, curved and slim as a scimitar; and a thin merciless knife slash of a mouth.

Try as he did, Cokie couldn't tear his eyes away from the face. A prayer, silent but heart-felt, came to Cokie's mind.

"Oh Lord, get me outa here and so help me, I'm offa the stuff! Honest; I'll take the cure. I'll do anything! Just get me outa here!"

THEN the slit-mouth opened and a voice, wondrously melodious and soft, began to converse with Cokie's guide. Cokie knew they were talking about him, for the guide would point to him now and then and act as though he was explaining something to "Slit-mouth."

This went on for several minutes. Finally, Slit-mouth uttered two short words, which sounded like "Aveyah-tu." And Slit-mouth and his face disappeared. Again darkness. This time Cokie was thankful for it. Just so long as that face didn't come back.

The soft light came back again to reveal the figured, tapestried walls. And Cokie's guide turned a white-toothed smiling face to him and said:

"Come! The Master is expecting you! You have come to seek. And you have found!"

After which gibberish, he turned and led the way back through the passage again.

Cokie wanted only one thing. OUT! But he was stuck. So he did the only thing he could do: followed the dark-faced guy. Only they didn't come back to the office.

Just before they came to the door which opened to the passage, Cokie's guide opened a side door.

"Enter," he said commandingly. "You will find the pipe is ready. And may your journey be a long and happy one."

He waited till Cokie walked in, then closed the door softly, yet with an air of finality.

Cokie looked around the room and whistled long in relief. And in content.

"I'll be damned!" he said to himself. "A 'smoke-house.' All this hocus-pocus; scare a guy half to death, then lead him to a dream pipe."

He shook his head in reproach. What a waste of time! When all they had to do was take a man's money and lead him to privacy.

"Well," he thought, "that's screwy. Nobody asked for dough. Maybe the first pipe is on the house."

He walked over to the bunk set against the wall. Beside it was a low tabouret, on which was set out a long straight-stemmed pipe, a lighter and a small cup. It was a familiar lay-out to Cokie. He preferred the sniff stuff, but he didn't mind the dream pipe once in a while.

He sat on the bunk, picked up the pipe and looked at it. He was quick to note that the nude design of the tapestries was repeated on the pipe.

The small bowl was filled with a brown pasty flowery-smelling stuff. He

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brought the bowl close to his nose and inhaled deeply. The stuff had an almost overpowering odor. He wrinkled his nose in disgust and said:

"Phooey! What a stink! Must be something new. Oh well, might as well light up and get happy."

He took several slow drags at the pipe, relaxed on the bunk and waited for the stuff to get to work. Smoke rings came up from the bowl of the pipe. A feeling of peace, of disassociation from his surroundings, took hold of him. The sweetly cloying odor seemed to fill the whole room.

THE smoke rings ascending from the pipe took on a more solid shape. Strange forms began to form within the greyish circles of smoke. Cokie began to imagine things. That each of the smoke circles held a lovely girl. It was an enjoyable sensation watching the rings, each with its lovely burden, reach the ceiling and disappear. Then something not so pleasant began to happen. The smoke rings held a new something. A something which brought a resurgence of that terror he had felt earlier. Only now it was even more terrible than before. For now he was in the grip of the narcotic. Helpless, he watched the new rings ascend. First they were small and held only the *face*, malignant and grinning with an unholy purpose. Then the rings became larger and larger, until thep seemed to fill the whole room. Then Cokie discovered the face had a body. A flowing figured robe of some heavy precious material covered the body.

Then Cokie saw the rings were no longer flowing up to the ceiling. Instead, they floated over the bunk on which he lay and hung there. Soon there were half a dozen of the rings floating over his head, each with its separate, same figure. Then the figures began to merge one into the other, until finally there was a single figure suspended between the grey walls of the smoke rings.

Cokie had the strange feeling the room had grown larger. The ceiling was higher, so high, in fact, that he could no longer see it. All he could see was the *descending* figure in the robe and turban. It came down to within a few feet of Cokie.

"Mokoki," it said, in that familiar melodious voice, "Come! Aveyah-tu awaits us. Come, I command thee!"

As though the command broke the spell Cokie's body was under, he felt his body float free of the bed.

"Come," the voice said again, "Aveyah-tu awaits us!"

The robed figure turned and began to walk upward to—*nothingness*. Cokie's body floated after him. The figure ahead began to move faster. So did Cokie. Only, as he floated along, he began to whirl. The whirling made him dizzy. And the faster he whirled, the dizzier he got. It had to end sometime. It did for Cokie. He passed out.

"COME, Aveyah-tu awaits us!"

Cokie opened his eyes. Those words had a familiar ring. Of course; the bearded goon in the fancy nightgown! He started to close his eyes again and felt a hand pluck at his shoulder.

"Come, Mokoki. *She* awaits your coming!"

Cokie looked up. That *face!* The double points of the beard were inches from his face.

"W—what do you w—want?" Cokie quavered.

"Get up, man," the exasperated voice said. "By my beard, have you lost your wits?"

"Oh sure, sure," Cokie hurriedly said, "I'll get up."

Then as he sat erect, he howled:

"Hey! I been robbed! Someone's

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got my clothes! And wit' my lucky piece."

This robe, gold-embroidered, voluminous as a night shirt, wasn't what he'd been wearing. Nor was the room the same. Certainly this soft, down-filled couch wasn't the hardwood, blanketed bunk he had fallen asleep on.

But that low voice, with its edge of impatience, was commanding Cokie:

"Was the wine too much for Mokoki? Or was the shy maiden so lovely, he has forgotten that Aveyah-tu demands his presence today? Come, man! This is no time for sleeping."

Cokie's, "Yeah, I'm coming. But I'd like to get a hold of the guy what swiped my lucky piece," was a meaningless jumble of low sounds to the man behind the beard. Even if he had heard Cokie, the words would have had no meaning to him.

For a second or two he watched Cokie's eyes swing wonderingly about the room. Then, his patience at an end, he grabbed Cokie by a wrist and dragged him from the low couch. Not content with that, he dragged him through an open doorway at one end of the room. Nor did he pay any attention to Cokie's protesting, "Hey, take it easy, bud!"

Cokie had looked with awe-filled eyes at the marble floor, walls and ceiling of the room in which he had awakened. The corridor down which he was being dragged was also marble from top to bottom.

His guide muttered in his beard, as he dragged Cokie along:

"A fine thing! Mokoki drunk! Aveyah-tu in one her unloveliest moods! And Kortan expected tonight! Why in the name of Ba-al did she have to choose me as high priest? And I was doing so well in the——"

His muttering had been broken off short by Cokie's sudden stop. He turned a startled face to see what had happened and found Cokie staring at a column of girls that had come out of an open doorway.

A half-naked black marched at the head of the column. Two others flanked it and another brought up the rear.

"Now what's wrong?" the beard asked. "You stare as though you've never seen a woman before."

"I—I—uh—well," Cokie ended lamely, "you see, I didn't——"

"Later, later," the other said. "After we see her. Then I'll have time to listen."

In a few minutes they came to a great arched doorway. A beautiful hand-wrought open-work door, made entirely of gold, barred all entrance. Beside it stood the original Mister Five-by Five.

He was the shortest and fattest man Cokie had ever seen. And he had the longest and thickest mustache in existance. It was so long that he had to tie it around his ears to keep it from dragging underfoot. He peered through the grillwork of the door. His great round face opened wide in a grin when he saw who was on the other side.

His voice, peculiarly hoarse, wheezed out a welcome:

"Greetings, O Lum, High Priest to Ba-al; and to you also Mokoki, Guardian of the Inner Portal. A lovely morning, no? And Kortan is expected tonight. Oh dear."

AT MENTION of Kortan's name, Lum's face had broken out with a look of fury. The little fat man's voice sounded contrite as he went on, but his twinkling eyes gave the lie to his tone:

"Oh dear," he said again, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. We all know the great love Mokoki bears for Kortan. And what Kortan thinks of Lum."

Then he broke out in hoarse laughter and opened the portal.

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"Fat fool!" Lum said as they passed through. Some day I will slit your tongue and tie it to your ears to keep that mustache company."

"Say," Cokie said, as they walked across the long marble floor of the chamber, "who's the little fat guy? And what was so funny?"

Lum paused. His face showed utter bewilderment. He looked for a long moment into the thin pinched face of Cokie. He examined the long thin pale twitching nose; the watery grey eyes; the weak mouth and the spot where the chin should have been. Then he shook his head in reproof.

"Mokoki jests," he said chidingly. "Who else could it be but that fat gossip Rhito?"

"Sure," Cokie said, acting as though it was a sly joke, "Rhito. Who else could it be?"

Things had been happening too fast for Cokie to permit him much time for thought. But now as he followed Lum, he began to speculate on his predicament. He looked a fool. And acted one. But the sharp boys of Van Buren Street were sometimes surprised by his wit.

"I can't figure this. I go to sleep and have a dream. I wake up and I'm still in the dream. Only it ain't a dream. It's real. And now my name is Mokoki and I'm the Guardian of the Inner Portal, whatever that is. And this jerk with me is Lum. Wonder where Abner is. And since I'm wondering, I wonder who this dame is we're going to see. Guess I'll keep my kisser closed until I see where the smart money lays."

His speculations came to an abrupt pause. Lum had stopped; and Cokie, following blindly, had bumped into him. Cokie looked up in surprise. Lum had stopped before the far wall of the room they had entered. A rapt look was on his face. Cokie wondered what the hell he was looking at. All *he* could see was a marble wall.

"Well," he thought, "if that's what we're supposed to do, I'll follow the leader."

They stood facing the wall for so long that Cokie began to feel discomfort. The one-piece robe he wore had no pockets and his hands kept making useless, empty gestures. His nose started to itch and moisture began to collect in one nostril. He raised his silk-covered arm toward his nose and realized again that he was no longer wearing the shabby garments of his normal state. But that damned itch was unbearable. He stole a covert glance at his companion and when he saw Lum had eyes only for the wall, he started to wipe his nose on his sleeve. But before he could complete the act, *it happened!*

THERE was a whirring sound. His robe flapped around his knees, as though a wind had rustled the garment. the wall, the room itself, whirled for a dizzying second, then all was still. Cokie opened dazed eyes and stared at the wall in front of him. Then they hadn't moved after all!

And a melodiously sweet voice said:

"Welcome, Lum and Mokoki! I have been patient in my waiting."

Cokie turned a startled face over his shoulder and let out a surprised, "Oops!"

This wasn't the room into which Rhito had left him. The roof of this room was as high and curved as that of a church Cokie had wandered into one winter's night. The walls were arched and buttressed in designs foreign to anything he had ever seen. The ornamentation of the architecture was so wonderful in its design that Cokie was entranced by it. The sweet voice spoke again:

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"Mokoki, as usual, lost in his day-dream, lags behind."

Lum was halfway across the long room to where a woman sat on a low throne. The woman spoke again. This time there was an impatient note disturbing the sweet voice:

"Well, don't stand there gawping! There are important things to discuss!"

Cokie made haste to follow Lum, who after arriving at the throne, made a low obeisance before the occupant and stepped to one side. Not even in the movies had Cokie seen such a beautiful woman. Coal black hair fell in soft waves about a heart-shaped face. Her throat was as white as the marble columns which filled the room. Jeweled breastplates held prisoner the full breasts. From her waist down she was covered by a heavy white silk skirt.

Instinct made him do as Lum had done. It was an excellent imitation. The deep sniffle which accompanied it spoiled the effect, however. Not knowing what else to do, he was about to move over beside Lum, when she stopped him.

"Now where are you going?" she snapped.

Cokie looked down into her eyes. And felt a deep fear sweep over him.

"I dunno," he mumbled, looking away. And saw for the first time who else was in the room.

"My Guardian of the Inner Portal!" her voice taunted him, "My procurer of virgins for the Feast of Ba-al! My Mokoki, who has promised to help me defeat Kortan! Bah! You are more stupid than Lum. Look! Even now, you have eyes only for my handmaidens."

Her voice barely penetrated the fog Cokie was in. His entire attention was taken up in looking at Aveyah-tu's handmaidens. He had never seen so many women. That is, in the flesh.

They were all over the place. Some were lolling on huge cushions. Others stood about in groups, laughing and chattering. Behind Aveyah-tu's throne a dozen of them stood, as though they were on guard. But what made Cokie's eyes go glassy was the clothing they wore. A fine material, gauze-thin, covered them from shoulder to ankle.

"Mokoki!"

Aveyah-tu screamed out his name.

He turned bewildered eyes in her direction. The look of anger blazing in her eyes, frightened him.

"Sorry, ma'am. I was just taking a gander at some of the frills in the joint," Cokie said in apology.

"Frills! Gander!" Exasperation made her voice go shrill. "This mumbo-jumbo talk of yours! Save it for Lum, the High Priest. We have more important things to discuss. Kortan, for example. And the Feast of Ba-al."

COKIE'S fingers nervously played with the belt of his garment. He knew something had to be done. And soon. Either he or they were crazy. If only he could find out what happened. Maybe the guy with the beard could tell him what this was all about. But how to arrange that? Well, there was only one way to do it.

"Y'know," he said, after an interval in which he appeared to be deep in thought, "I got an idea about that. But first I want to talk it over with Lum. That okay with you?"

"But you've already had two days. And Kortan arrives tonight."

"This won't take long." Cokie replied, "Maybe an hour or so."

"Very well, then. But," she warned, "no more delays."

Cokie nodded and motioned with his head for Lum to come with him. When Lum stood beside him Cokie whispered into his ear:

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"Hey, where can I talk to you in private?"

Lum looked at Cokie as though he thought Cokie had gone crazy.

"Don't give me the fish eye," Cokie snarled. "Just lead me to privacy."

Lum turned to the woman on the throne.

"May we use the ante-room?" he asked.

She inclined her head majestically.

Lum took Cokie by an elbow and steered him into a small room, which opened onto the larger one. Cokie, silent for a few seconds, arranged his thoughts as best he could, then launched into his story of what had happened from the time he walked into the smoke-house until he awoke.

"So you see, chum," he said in conclusion, "I'm in the dark. I don't know whether I'm nuts or what. You people seem to know me. You call me Mokoki. But I'm not! I'm Cokie Mokey, from Van Buren Street, in Chicago. Now how in the hell did I get here? And how do I get out?"

Cokie finished talking and looked with anxious eyes at Lum, who stood facing the wall. He seemed to find more interest in the frieze ornamentation there than in Cokie's tale. But when he turned to face Cokie, there was a look of sardonic amusement in his eyes. His smooth-shaven upper lip twitched in a smile.

"Sit down, Cokie, my friend from the future," Lum said. "I, too, have a tale to tell. So let me first talk of the past; later we will talk of the present."

So Lum told his tale, broken only by an occasional sniffle from Cokie.

"About six months ago," Lum began, "just before Aveyah-tu called me to be her High Priest, I was engaged in my trade of necromancer."

He grinned suddenly. The grin made him look more human. At the word "necromancer", Cokie's mouth had popped open.

"I see you don't understand," Lum explained. "I was a magician. Perhaps not one of the great ones. But still, my public was satisfied. Love philtres, spells, magic medicinals and, once in a while, transmutations. Because of the last, you are here. And this will be an even greater surprise to you; you are still there, in the future. And so am I."

LUM paused for a few seconds, rocking slowly back and forth on his heels. Then he continued:

"As I said before, about six months ago I was engaged in my trade. At the time I was deep in an experiment. Something that had to do with changing base metals into gold. Many acids were used in the process I was developing. One night, Cokie, I was using an acid made with a lotus base, when suddenly I began to feel sleepy. The fumes from the acid became thicker, heavier and I lost consciousness."

He had stopped the rocking and had began to pace back and forth across the room, as he went on speaking. When he came to the place in his story where he had lost consciousness, he stopped his pacing and pointing his finger suddenly at Cokie, asked:

"And can you guess what happened to me?"

Cokie lifted his shoulders in an expressive gesture.

"The same thing that happened to you," Lum said simply.

Cokie looked blank for a second. Then, as he caught the meaning of Lum's words, he sat erect and said in an awestruck whisper:

"Holy catfish! You mean to say, you're the guy in the 'smoke-house?'"

Lum nodded his head in agreement.

"Well how come *you* don't remember? And *I* do?" Cokie wanted to know.

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"Ah my friend, if I could answer those questions, I would truly be one of the great magicians," Lum replied, smiling. "I can only guess. Perhaps there was something in the acid's smoke which disturbed the proper time sequences. How the transposition of souls was affected, however, I cannot explain. But that it *was* done, we both know. So, you are here now and—at the same time—there. And so am I. With this important difference. I know only this life. You are knowing both, past and future. Of course you realize there is no present for you."

A heart-felt "damn" burst from Cokie's lips.

"Hell, mister!" he said in exasperation. "You haven't explained a thing, as far as I'm concerned. All I know is, that I'm here and something's supposed to happen, with me as chief character. All I want is for you to give me a break and tip me off. What's supposed to be cookin' here?"

Somehow Lum understood.

"Yes," he agreed, "you are, as you say, the chief character. You are Mokoki, Guardian of the Inner Portal. In other words, head of the temple police. You have other duties, also. For instance you are in charge of the secret police of all the temples in the land of Ba-al. Thus you knew of Kortan's plans. That, my friend, is why Aveyah-tu has called us. To plan the destruction of that estimable character Kortan. And because you are what you are, Aveyah-tu will undoubtedly choose you as the executioner."

Cokie had taken in only fragments of Lum's explanation.

"Well, I'll be parleyed!" Cokie exclaimed. "If the boys on Van Buren Street could see me now! Cokie Mokey, head of the Gestapo and trigger man for the Syndicate."

He basked in the roseate glow of his new-found glory for a few seconds. Then he remembered what Lum had said in conclusion.

"Hey! Wait a minute! Ya mean I got to knock off this guy Kortan?" he demanded.

Lum raised inquiring eyebrows.

"Y'know. *Kill* this Kortan," Cokie translated.

"That is correct. But then, that is Kortan's fault for being an unbeliever. The Feast of Ba-al has always begun with the Sacrifice of the Virgins! This notion of Kortan's, that the Sacrifice is a shameful, lustful atrocity, must not go farther. What was considered proper for hundreds of years cannot be given up in a moment. But about his execution. I have been thinking; and I have an idea. When we go back, let me do all the talking. Perhaps the High Priestess will like my plan?"

"It's okay with me, brother," Cokie agreed, "so long as I don't have to bump anybody off. Gee," he burst out, as they started to leave, "I just thought of a swell parley for Finnegan. And the poor guy isn't even born yet."

AVEYAH-TU still sat in her throne. She looked as though it was a permanent position. There was a somber brooding look in her black eyes.

"Well?" she said. It was both a question and a command.

Lum took over the conversational reins. His voice dripped honey and persuasion.

"Oh, High Priestess to Ba-al," he began, "your servants have planned a very unusual evening for Kortan. Unusual, but satisfying. How sad for Kortan that he will not be here at the finish." He waited, lips parted in a grin.

"Yes, yes, man," the High Priestess commanded, "tell me the plan. Never mind the dramatics! Just tell me the plot."

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She leaned forward, breasts heaving and eyes glittering in anticipation.

"If I may speak in privacy?" Lum suggested, looking about the room.

She understood and motioned for him to come forward. He whispered into her ear for several minutes and when he finished, she clapped her hands in glee.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" she trilled joyfully. "How beautiful! And knowing Kortan, it is the only method that will succeed. I am well pleased, indeed, with my counselor's plan. Yours and Mokoki's reward will be great indeed. But enough talk. Go now and prepare for tonight."

Then, as a sudden thought struck her, she asked anxiously:

"Do you think you will be able to make ready by this evening?"

"I am certain of it," Lum assured her. He bowed low before her and started to leave, motioning Cokie to follow him.

Cokie, day-dreaming as usual, had been paying no attention to the whispered conversation of Lum and Aveyah-tu. His thoughts revolved around the parley he had for Finnegan.

"If only I had my lucky piece with me. Then I know it'd be a cinch. Gosh! Where am I going to get another one," his thoughts went. It never occured to him that Finnegan no longer existed. Or that the world he was in had no knowledge of horse racing.

They had taken only a few steps towards the pivot in the wall, when it turned, erupting Rhito into the room. The fat little man with the oversize Colonna mustache was panting in excitement as he waddled up to the throne.

"Oh, Most High," he shrilled, as he dropped to his knees before Aveyah-tu, "Kortan is here! He waits outside the Golden Gate."

The High Priestess sat erect at mention of Kortan's name.

"Alone?"

"No, Most High," Rhito bleated, "there are others with him. He demands an audience!"

"So Kortan *demands* an audience," Aveyah-tu said softly. "Very well! Go, fat one, and tell the impudent fool he shall have one. But he alone. The others must stay behind!"

And as Rhito hastened to do the High Priestess' bidding, Aveyah-tu said to Lum and Cokie:

"Best stay awhile! I do not want him to become suspicious."

Again the wall pivoted. And Cokie's breath went out in a slow whistle of amazement, when he saw who came into the room. It wasn't the way he was dressed—although that alone would have, under other circumstances, elicited surprise. For, unlike Cokie and Lum, he was attired in brightly gleaming metal. From his waist to his throat the armor fit snug. He wore a short skirt to his knees. His legs, like his chest, were protected by shining metal. A long sword swung at his side. No, it wasn't the armor or the upright military bearing of the man that made Cokie stare. It was the stranger's face.

Cokie felt as though he were staring into a mirror, when he looked into Kortan's face.

"Like looking in one of those mirrors in Riverview Park," Cokie thought. "He looks like me, yet he doesn't."

The resemblance was startling. Kortan could have been Cokie's twin so alike were they. But a closer inspection revealed differences. There were no lines of weakness or indecision on Kortan's features. There were strength and determination from the small jutting chin to the scornful eyes.

"Ho!" he said, as he came to an erect halt before the three, "So the jackel and weasel are still dancing attendance

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to Aveyah-tu."

"You came here to quarrel, Kortan?" she asked.

"No," he replied, "those two are nothing to quarrel about. And what I have to talk to Aveyah-tu about, is for her ears alone."

"Very well, Kortan," she said, agreeing to his demand. "Go and prepare for the Feast, tonight." she instructed the other two men.

Again Lum bowed and started off. Cokie followed. This time there were no interruptions.

WHEN they had arrived back in Cokie's room, Lum made himself comfortable while slaves prepared Cokie for the evening. Lum's dark eyes gleamed bright with laughter as he watched and listened to Cokie making an effort to appear casual under the attentions of the slaves. Even the points of his beard seemed to smile.

Cokie wasn't doing badly: that is, until two slave girls walked in. One knelt at his feet and began to undo his sandals, while the other began to tug at his robe in an effort to get it over his head.

"Hey, wait!" Cokie said in alarm, as he began to back away from them. Wait a minute. What'cha tryin' to do? Undress me?"

"How else can you take a bath?" Lum interjected.

Lum's question made every speck of dirt under Cokie's fingernails quiver in alarm. The man, himself, stood stock-still in horror.

"Ya mean I gotta take a *bath?*" he quavered. "What for?" Then, as the girls continued in their efforts to disrobe him, he said, as he went skipping about the room, the girls in pursuit:

"Hey, Lum! Get these dames offa me. I can take my clothes off without help. Take your hands off me, you—you——" The last to one of the girls who had finally managed to grab him. Lum could hardly blame him for shouting so. She had one arm around his throat and with the other was reaching for the hem of his robe. When the other girl reached the two wrestling in the center of the room, it looked as though Cokie was going to get undressed, whether he wanted to or not. Then Lum, still laughing, gave an order for the girls to desist in their efforts.

Cokie, panting heavily, gasped out:

"Thanks, pal. I sure thought I was a goner then. Man, all that excitement just to take a bath. Wonder what would happen if I had to get a shave and haircut?"

The mingled look of bewilderment and fury in Cokie's face brought on a fresh outburst of laughter from Lum.

"Oh dear," he said, wiping tears from his eyes, "I haven't laughed so hard since Rhito split his breeches making obeisance to Aveyah-tu. Which reminds me. She likes my plan."

"Say," Cokie interposed, "this Kortan looks like quite a guy. I'd be kind of leery of mixing with a gee like him."

"Oh, yes," Lum agreed, "Kortan is quite a man. Considered the greatest warrior in the land. Did you—uh—notice the resemblance?"

"Yeah. Looked enough like me to be my twin."

"Not your twin, but your atavar."

"Huh?"

"Your atavar. That is—" Lum tried to explain but made no headway.

"What's the difference," Cokie said at last, "he's quite a guy."

Lum agreed again and left, saying he would pick Cokie up on the way to the Feast.

WHEN he returned later, it was to find a brighter, cleaner-smelling Cokie.

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"Say, Lum," Cokie said as they walked down the marble corridor, "maybe there's something to be said for the Saturday-night bath. I gotta admit I sure feel good."

But Lum, for once, was silent. Cokie could see he was deep in thought and he had an idea about what.

" 'Matter, kid? That Kortan guy got ya worried?"

Lum didn't seem to have heard Cokie's question. He continued to walk, silent and absorbed in his thoughts. They came to the blank wall and instead of turning left, as they had done before, Lum turned right.

The corridor began to slope upward. It wound around and around, like a circular staircase. Cokie, looking down behind him, could see others making their way up the incline. The corridor reached its end before a huge domed inclosure.

"The Inner Temple of Ba-al," Lum explained in a whisper.

A number of armed men stood beside a great door. Cokie and Lum entered the door and came into the largest room Cokie had ever seen. Ten thousand people could have found room to dance in that immense place. In the very center of the room a huge table had been placed. The Feast of Ba-al had already begun, for they saw slaves bringing huge platters of steaming meats to the table.

Cokie took in the table with one short glance. The huge statue which filled one side of the room from floor to ceiling took all his attention. Insofar as his wondering look could make out, it was a huge face, carved from some brownish-colored rock. It wasn't quite a normal-looking face. The great stone monstrosity seemed all mouth. Cokie could see streamers of grayish smoke issuing from the cavernous mouth.

He had no time to observe more. They had arrived at the banquet table. Aveyah-tu, seated in a large, golden chair at the head of the table, motioned for them to take the two vacant seats beside her.

"Now," she said, as they sat down, "that Mokoki and Lum are here, let the Feast begin."

The steaming savory food reminded Cokie he hadn't eaten since he'd left the Chicago Coffee Shop. While the others talked, he ate. Strangely enough, he seemed to be the only one with an appetite at their end of the table.

Lum merely picked at what the slaves brought. Aveyah-tu didn't even do that. There seemed to be an air of tense expectation hovering over the table. Then Cokie saw Kortan . . . and understood. The warrior sat, stiff and cold-looking, in his chair directly across from Cokie. Even Cokie became immersed in the feeling of impending drama. Aveyah-tu finally broke the silence.

"I see that Kortan cannot forget himself, even at the Feast of Ba-al."

"No!" Kortan exclaimed, sitting even straighter than before, "Aveyah-tu knows of my feelings. Ba-al is an inhuman, merciless, and bloodthirsty God. Only such a God would demand the Sacrifice of the Virgins."

IT WAS a long speech for the warrior and he spoke so loudly and in such heat that every one at the table looked at him.

The word "sacrilege" leaped from half a hundred throats. There were some who pushed their chairs back, as though words were not enough. Only action could answer Kortan. But he remained silent and unmoved through all the hubub. Aveyah-tu lifted a slender shapely arm in a gesture which commanded silence.

"Kortan is indeed a brave man to

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beard the God in his own den. But then we all know how brave he is. Perhaps he is clever also."

There was a note of irony in her voice.

"My deeds are not of the tongue," Kortan answered. "but of the sword!"

"How true," she said. "Is that why he brought ten thousand others swords to help him? Against one woman and a stone God."

Kortan remained silent at her jibe.

"Why does Kortan rail so much at the Sacrifice of the Virgins? It is a small price to pay for the God's approval."

"It is a sacrifice of blood! They die a needless death," Kortan said through tightly held lips.

"No," she said quietly, "they but seek Nirvana. There is no death for them."

"Then why haven't any come back?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders in reply.

Cokie, wide-eyed and thrilled by what was going on, could not keep his eyes from Kortan. He became aware of whispering in his ear. It was Lum.

"How clever Aveyah-tu is," Lum whispered. "See how she draws him into the trap?"

"What do you mean?" Cokie asked.

Lum laughed softly, slyly.

"What do you think I've been doing all afternoon?" he asked. And answered. "Preparing the trap. And you, my dear Cokie, are going to be bait."

"Me!"

"Yes, you. Here is how it is to be done. The High Priestess will taunt him on his personal bravery. Then she will tell him you are going to sacrifice yourself to Ba-al."

"You're nuts," Cokie broke in, "if you think I'm going to do that!"

"Wait!" Lum said. "It has all been arranged. A half dozen under-priests have a net prepared for your descent. You will fall into the net. Then you will wait for our signal and re-enter. In the meantime Kortan will follow you to prove his bravery. Only this time, there will be no net. So that when you come back and he does not, it will prove that, because he is an unbeliever, Ba-al accepted his sacrifice. Clever isn't it?"

"Brother," Cokie said admiringly, "I'll say it's clever! You sure are smooth. I'll bet you could steal Goering right from under Hitler's nose."

Aveyah-tu's voice suddenly rang out over the table.

"I have listened to your sacrilege long enough. It is time to prove you wrong. Ba-al is all-wise and all-knowing. Here at this table are gathered my High Priests. And here too are friends of your own choosing. Kortan, I offer you a test. I shall ask for a volunteer from my priests, to make the sacrifice to Ba-al. Will you do the same as one of my weakling priests? Or does you blood turn to milk at the thought?"

KORTAN did not answer for a moment. Instead, he looked around the table, his glance pausing for a barely perceptible second, to stare into each face. As though by so doing he would find the answer in their faces. Only blankness met his look. But with a slight difference. The faces of his men were blank with cold indifference, as though the whole issue was of no importance to them. They knew Kortan would not fail them. The faces of the priests, however, reflected the inward sneers they felt.

At last he looked directly at Aveyah-tu.

"A very pretty problem. A fanatic priest to commit suicide, and you rid yourself of me." he said softly.

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The High Priestess' words were as venom.

"So Kortan's bravery is all in his mouth!"

"No, but I dislike being led into such a position."

"You think it is a trap then?"

"Well, if Lum, or—better—Mokoki, whose weak stomach for brave deeds is well known, would volunteer for this test, perhaps——" He left the rest unsaid.

Aveyah-tu's eyes gleamed bright with an unholy light. The trap was sprung. Kortan was caught. Her smile held triumph, as she turned to Mokoki.

Lum nudged Cokie. He winked broadly as he said:

"Get up! And don't worry."

Cokie stood up. He felt their eyes on him. Their eyes were as spotlights which sought out and saw every weakness of the man. The watery eyes, the long quivering nose with the nostrils always showing wet, the weak mouth and chin.

Cokie tried to grin to show disregard of the danger he was volunteering for. But they only saw the lips part in a foolish, vacant grin. As he stepped forward to Aveyah-tu, who had beckoned to him, Lum whispered again:

"Remember! Jump *first!* Close to the wall."

Cokie tried to stand erect but only achieved something like a half-stoop. A sardonic grin twisted Kortan's lips, as he watched Cokie make his way to Aveyah-tu. His feet suddenly kicked his chair back. It leaped, clattering and skittering across the marble floor. All eyes were riveted on the short, armor-clad, stiff-shouldered warrior, as he stood erect.

"So the jackel has grown a lion's mane," he said, speaking directly to Cokie.

Cokie, standing with downcast eyes, looked up at Kortan's remark, then glanced down again. He could have sworn there was a look almost of respect in the other's eyes.

"Are you ready for the test, Mokoki?" Aveyah-tu asked.

"Sure. Any time you say, kid," Cokie answered.

"Very well, then," she said, rising to her feet, "let us go to the mouth of the God."

As though her arising was a signal, two doors at either side of the great stone face opened and from each a line of girls came forth. They formed a half moon around the mouth, which was now belching out great quantities of smoke.

The three, with Aveyah-tu in the lead, marched up to within a few feet of the horrible image. There was a look almost of content on her face.

"The precipice," she announced. "Who leaps first?"

COKIE blithely stepped forward onto the ledge, which was the lower lip of the God. Smoke kept bubbling out from the depths, as from a volcano. Cokie's noistrils wrinkled as he sniffed the odor from the smoke. It had a vaguely familiar odor. He looked, once, down into the smoke-filled abyss, then quickly looked away. His new found bravery almost deserted him then. Turning, he sent a sickly smile in the direction of those watching him. At the sight of the triumphantly gloating Priestess, the tensely waiting Lum and the indifferent Kortan, something on which Lum and the High Priestess hadn't reckoned came to life in the thin breast of Cokie.

"What am I doing?" he asked himself. "I must be going off my nut. This Kortan guy looks like a plenty all-right character. And just because those two jerks want to knock him off, I'm playing the fall guy. What did Lum say

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about him being a sort of ancestor of mine? Can't do that to a relative. Besides, how do I know Lum's playing square about that net? After all, he'll get rid of two fish with one bait."

And so Cokie opened his mouth and yelled:

"It's a plot, Kortan! Get out of here!"

It took Aveyah-tu by surprise and allowed Kortan time enough to draw his sword.

In a few seconds the room became a bedlam. Kortan's friends were badly outnumbered by the followers of Aveyah-tu. Twice they almost succeeded in hacking their way to the inner door. But each time the sheer number of their opponents forced them back.

How the sword got into Cokie's hand, he didn't know. He knew only that he was beside Kortan, swinging his weapon at whatever white robe he could see. But the one man he wanted most to meet somehow eluded him.

Kortan's sword was a whirling, flashing arc of destruction. Once, when there was a second's breathing spell, Kortan said:

"Good man! But swing, thrust; don't hack away," and Cokie felt as though a great honor had been accorded him.

The odds were too great against them, however. One by one, Kortan's friends fell, until only Cokie and he were left. They stood on the brink of the ledge now. The half-hundred priests, with Aveyah-tu and Lum at their head, faced them.

Kortan grinned twistedly and said:

"Well, Brother, one last blow—then the abyss."

Cokie's heart almost burst at the word "brother" from Kortan's lips.

"Yeah," he answered, "too bad. I had a hell of a parley for Finnegan."

Then Kortan lifted his sword and hurled it like a javelin. Cokie's followed a second later. And in that second before he followed Kortan into the whirlpool of smoke, he saw the swords strike —Kortan's in the breast of the High Priestess, and his in Lum's throat. Then he leaped into Ba-al's throat. And, like automatons, the virgins followed.

THE smoke seemed like a huge pillow to Cokie. After the first breath-taking plunge, he floated gently down, embraced by the grey.

"Funny," Cokie thought, "this stuff smells just like that pipe filler I used on Van Buren Street. H'm. Maybe that double-crosser Lum cooked up some of his flowers."

The grey clouds kept getting thicker and the heavy scent made Cokie dizzy. He began to wonder when he'd land and where Kortan was. Suddenly he began to whirl. Faster and faster. The whirling made him dizzy.

"Wait! Wait!" he screamed . . . and landed with a thud—just as the curtain went up.

Cokie lifted himself from the floor. Kortan, a few feet away, was just coming to his feet. Scattered about the stage of the White Way Burlesque Theater, were the fifty virgins who had leaped in after them.

Cokie recognized where he was the moment he came to his feet. The sudden shouting, clapping and whistling of the patrons made him wonder what had happened. Then he saw the virgins getting to their feet and understood. Burlesque had never been like this before.

Coincident with the sudden explosion of the patrons' applause, the shrill of police whistles were heard. A beefy red-faced policeman dashed onto the stage from the wing and announced:

"All right, men, quiet down. The house is pinched. Just file out the

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exits."

Then turning to Cokie and the wide-eyed Kortan, he snarled:

"So! A couple of wise guys, huh? The captain'll be glad to see you boys. This joint was going too far. Just wait till he hears about this."

Cokie and Kortan, still dressed in the clothes in which they had made their descent, faced Captain O'Grady across his desk. The captain had his feet comfortably on the green blotter.

"So," O'Grady said blandly, "that's your story, is it? And that's how those naked women got to be on the stage." He shook his head sorrowfully.

"Come now," he continued, "you don't expect me to believe that, do you?"

"But it's the truth, Cap," Cokie said, a plea for justice in his voice.

"The truth eh? Well—" and suddenly O'Grady was bellowing—"here's some truth! I'd be a damn fool to believe that cock and bull story! And that's what the judge is going to say when he hears it. Mokey, I'm prefering charges against you of immortality, indecent exposure and anything else I can think of."

He glared at them for a second, then barked:

"All right, Welden, take 'em back to the cell."

The barred door had barely closed behind Cokie and Kortan, when it opened again and someone else was thrust in. Cokie saw that Finnegan stood on the other side of the door.

"Holy cats!" Finnegan whispered, "there's *three* of you now!"

No wonder Finnegan thought he was losing his mind. He had been a member of the Narcotic Squad that afternoon when they had raided the Syrian on Va[illegible]ren Street. And who had been found there but Cokie. A peculiar thing had happened. Just as they were being loaded into the wagon, the Syrian had suddenly died of heart attack.

"Oh Lord," Finnegan muttered, as he looked at the three men in the cell, "wasn't it bad enough with one Cokie in this world? Now—and may the Saints perserve us—there's *three* of you!"

But there was something wrong somewhere. Finnegan shook his head hard. Then he rubbed his eyes. *This couldn't be!* The figures of Cokie in his robe and Kortan were slowly merging into one of the figures of Cokie Mokey. Now there was only *one* Cokie in the cell.

"Cokie," Finnegan whispered in fright, "what happened? Where's the other two guys?"

"What guys, Finnegan? There's only me here."

Finnegan backed away from Cokie as the little man came toward the bars.

"Psst, Finnegan, C'mere," Cokie said. "I've got a swell parlay for you. At Sportsman's, third and fourth races. Play Amazing and Fantastic. A cinch to win."

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READER'S PAGE

IN MEMORIAM

Confirmation has been received of the death in action of David Wright O'Brien on a B-17 mission over Germany last December 11. To the Chicago writers who knew Dave O'Brien, and to the thousands who read his stories in Ziff-Davis fiction magazines, Dave's passing comes as another harsh reminder that war takes the best from among us, for reasons which few of us are so naive as to explain away.

Dave O'Brien practically grew up with *Amazing Stories* and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. One of his very first yarns, "Truth Is a Plague," was so good that Phil Stong included it in his anthology, "The Other Worlds."

Dave, in fact, was himself somewhat out of this world. Spiritual depression, frustration, doubts as to his place in the world never assailed him. To many of us he seemed uncommonly good natured, with a grin and a wisecrack for any and all occasions.

They say that the spirit of elves inhabits the soul of an Irishman. Dave was as Irish as they come, not in brogue or in affectation but in his general outlook. Minor disappointments did not get him down. If the prophet of doom had come around to his door, Dave would have conked him over the noggin with a bottle of Scotch.

Dave grew up to wreck his first car, become a favorite with Ziff-Davis readers, get married and find himself involved in the four freedoms and the Atlantic charter. He chose to implement his place in the war as an aerial gunner. The last stories he did for FANTASTIC, in fact, were partially plunked out on a portable typewriter in England while Dave was on a training flight.

With Dave gone, an empty seat will speak poignantly at the festive table when, after the war, his friends get together in Chicago to chew the fat and exchange wartime experiences, some bitter, some cynical, none of them easy to forget.

"You guys are a bunch of creeps," Dave would say disgustedly, if he were present. "It was a great war, and you know it. For the first time in your lives, Uncle Sam supported you instead of Editor Ray Palmer, and you're still kicking!"

Yes, that would be just like Dave. Like Dave, and, in a sense, like the thousands of other young fellows who went off to war with a grin and a joke, never to return in this world.

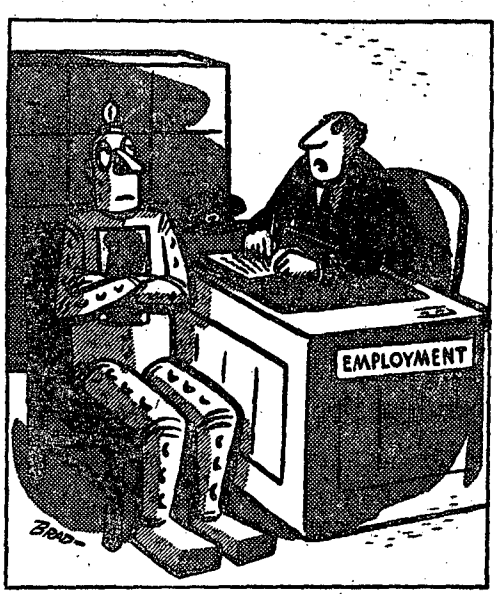
In another world? Well, when Dave got to heaven, St. Peter didn't ask to see his army dog tags.

"Come in, son, come in," said the keeper of the gate. "We need somebody around to brighten up the place. Glad to have you aboard."

"Glad to be aboard, sir," said David Wright O'Brien. "I'll do the best I can."

ARTHUR T. HARRIS,
Military Secret,
U. S. A.

We present this tribute by one of David Wright O'Brien's fellow writers as one of the most fitting of all, from one of his buddies who is carrying on where he left off—to final victory.—ED.



"I didn't ask you if you were married—I asked you if you had any experience with mechanical things."

HAS SKYLARK TO TRADE!

Sirs:

I have the "Skylark of Space" (August, September and October 1928) *Amazing Stories* in good condition. Will trade for telescope or cash—best offer.

CHARLES L. TURNER,
957 Beechwood Road,
Columbus 9, Ohio.

Get ready to DUCK, Turner!—ED.

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PLEA FOR PEN PAL

Sirs:

Picked up a back issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, May 1943. It's got all it takes and a little more. I have read a lot of pulp magazines, but for good stories, stories that take a chap's mind off the grimmer things of life—torpedoing, days at sea, on a life raft—give me FA. I'm sold.

In your correspondence corner, wouldn't it be better if a little more space was given to describe a pen pal—height, weight, color of hair, religion, nationality, age, etc.?

I am short of stature, 5'2", 137 lbs., brown hair and eyes, dark complexion, Catholic, two years high school, 30 years old January 1st, of this year, single, but willing (can't find a home loving girl), rating aboard ship, chief steward.

It will give me great pleasure if you will be so kind as to put my plea in print for Pen Pals in your next issue of FA. On return trips I pick up my mail at my Union. This is my native state. Born in Stockton, Calif. I am an orphan since the age of two. I would like to hear from other people of both sexes who are orphans. Any one from nine to ninety, tall, short, stout, don't be bashful. Let's give the little Merchant Marine a big hand.

LAUREL R. (SHIPWRECK) KELLY, USMM.,
% Nat. Maritime Union,
91 Drumm Street,
San Francisco, Calif.

Okay, Shipwreck, there's your plea. Hope there's a raft of mail waiting for you next trip in. —ED.

WILCOX IS BEST

Sirs:

I have read FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories* for quite some time and have enjoyed them very much. I like best of all the stories by Don Wilcox, especially his "The Singing Skulls" in the April issue. Next on my list, for this issue, is "Escape from Doom" by John Wilstach. He has a habit of making you want to find out what happens. He's okay on my list. The rest of the stories were okay, too.

I'd like to read some more stories on the order of Robert Moore Williams' "The Return of Jongor."

WILLIAM MAINARD,
609½ W. 59th St.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

IT WON'T WORK!

Sirs:

My husband and I are followers of the various science-fiction periodicals that make an honest attempt to bring to the average reader the results and theories of scientific research in a colorful manner.

We have enjoyed your vignettes of famous scientists and other editorial features because they have stuck to the truth or were the logical conclusions of interesting hypothetical situations. BUT —my husband seemed extremely indignant and

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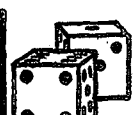

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Miscellaneous

FREE YOURSELF FROM TOBACCO. I will help you. S. B. Rickett, Honesdale, Penna.

voiced a loud protest when viewing the "Jet Boat of Tomorrow" as pictured and explained in your April '45 issue. Such words as poppy-cock, phooey, and a skeptical laugh came from the arm chair when he read Henry Gade's explanation. I agree with him and take this opportunity to question that particular jet-boat.

Artist James B. Settles should be complimented, for the boat is really beautiful gliding along the imaginary (and I mean imaginary) smooth Atlantic. But where, may I ask does Henry Gade propose to find this calm water? Surely not in the North Atlantic where swells the year round climb as high as 50 feet! No boat could travel such hilly country and still stay in contact with it at 300 mph. Proof of this probably can be found in the tests of various take-off characteristics of large flying boats.

And why not use an under-water jet unit of which many were pictured in Popular Mechanics of as long ago as 1930. And since when does a jet propulsion of Gade's type operate at almost 100% efficiency at sea level? We understand that jet propulsion efficiency is reached when the mass being moved by the jet approaches the velocity of the gases escaping from the jet nozzle which is surely hundreds of times greater than 300 mph.

Somehow it would seem that FANTASTIC ADVENTURES has been hood-winked and would be more accurate if it pictured space travel and travel in the stratosphere where comfort and speed will be accomplished after this war. To use your own comparison to the German robomb, 200 passengers, baggage, and some freight will cross the Atlantic in a matter of minutes with that motor or one similar to it.

In closing may I compliment B. G. Davis and staff in their excellent selection features. Some stories are splendid but others are neither fantastic nor interesting but then I am not a critic, self-styled or otherwise concerning your selection of boogey tales each month.

This is my first letter to any magazine and I don't want to appear the crank yet can't help feeling that you would want something just a little possible for your back cover.

SHIRLEY C. ADAMS,
San Diego 5, Calif.

What about this, Henry? Looks like we'll have to use your jet boat in smooth water, or back water!—ED.

FANATICAL RAVINGS

Sirs:

In your January issue there was a story by Don Wilcox entitled "The Devil's Pigs." This may seem a bit late for a comment on this tale, but I feel that I must give vent to my feelings of disgust upon reading the *favorable* reaction on the worthy readers' parts. This my first letter to *any* publication, therefore you may readily see how bitterly I feel over that literary expression of hatred, viciousness and malice seldom equalled, I'll wager, by even the Nazis themselves. How any decent hu-

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man being could entertain such thoughts as this Wilcox expresses is beyond me. I have always been a fantasy enthusiast, and have accepted the unacceptable, but to accept that story is against Christian principles. Such fanatical ravings one might expect of a totalitarian tyrant, but not of a man in our democratic ally, the U. S. A.

The April issue carried something similarly disgusting, "Change for the Bitter" by Francis. The other war novel wasn't too bad ("Dragons Behind Us") except for the inaccuracy with regard to the names Siegfried, mentioned on the title page, and Siegmung, used throughout the story. As I remember, Siegfried is the correct name.

All other stories were indeed worthy of publication, and were enjoyed very much by yours truly, who remains, as ever, an FA fan.

R. W. KNOWLES, SGT.,
Canadian Active Army,
Jacques Cartier Barracks,
196 Rue St. Charles,
Longueuil, Quebec, Canada.

Standing behind your editor as he writes this response to your letter are several shadowy figures, and behind them MILLIONS OF OTHERS. These shadowy figures we can name—David Wright O'Brien, the best author we had, killed in action; David Palmer, our own brother, brutally murdered in the snows of Luxembourg . . . and dozens of others of our associates and close friends. They cannot speak, but they compel us to!

Mr. Knowles, you speak of Christian principles. Do you consider that the Germans and the Japs are Christians? Do you consider that they have principles? Do you believe that they are fighting to establish love and peace and gentility and high-mindedness? Do you say that they are not fanatics, that they do not rave, that they are not brutal murderers, sadists, torturers? Do you say that they are HUMAN?

You wear the uniform of a soldier of Canada—and you do not feel bitter because your countrymen die uselessly in a horrible war in the making of which they had NO PART? But you DO feel bitter because a courageous writer paints the mad pigs of Germany in their true light! Is it disgusting to call a killer a killer? Is it disgusting to question their high principles? Is it disgusting to want to live in peace and in harmony in the Christian way? Must we who are God-fearing (or more correctly, God-LOVING) deny the rightness of that God by casting ourselves before murdering swine and burrowing our heads in the sands of false righteousness? RIGHT is something to fight for; and to believe that the MEEK shall inherit the Earth by being PIGS LED TO SLAUGHTER is the philosophy of a fool.

Far be it from us to wish anyone evil, but perhaps the day may come when you, as a soldier of UNFANATICAL RIGHTNESS, will see with your own eyes, filmed with horror, the TRUTH that "this Wilcox" has tried gently to reveal to you!—ED.

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GEE, DALLAS!

Sirs:

It was an amazing thing to open the April '45 issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and discover the astounding, startling fact that all the stories but one, a planet story, were fantasies. Weird, indeed, I thought, and began to wonder—could this actually be a renaissance in science fiction?

There is only one trouble with the issue. The Reader's Page was too short. It should be at least 6 full pages long.

Next we turn to the stories. For once I don't find much to complain about, except the novel, "Escape from Doom." With only a page of fantasy in it (the brain machine and the talisman healing burns) it leaves all the novel devoid of this ingredient.

1. "Change for the Bitter"—so screwy and fantastic I chose it for first place.
2. "The Incomplete Angler"—nice, snappy ending.
3. "Lefty Feep Gets Henpecked"—if Lefty was a rooster, how could he lay an egg?
4. "The Singing Skulls"—Wilcox in the groove again.
5. "The Conqueror"—good, even though it had a stale plot.
6. "The Carousel"—Marcia's reactions in the end remind me of my sister. Urrgh!
7. "All Kinds of People"—still good, even if I did guess the ending.
8. "Dragon's Behind Us"—pretty fair.
9. "Escape from Doom"—pfft!

G. DALLAS,
6615 Lawnview Ave.,
Cleveland 3, Ohio.

We asked Lefty about this egg-laying business and he was highly indignant. He glared at us and stalked off, muttering something about "no sense of humor, the jerk!" Maybe we just aren't very good at understanding these simple stories, eh? You and me, both!—ED.

REALLY FINE FANTASY

Sirs:

I have just finished the April FA and would like you to know my opinion of the stories. First of all, I was very much disappointed in Wilstach's novel. It seems much more like a detective story than a fantasy to me. True, it has its fantastic aspects, but they are few and far between. In a few words, this yarn is a glorified detective story and not a fantasy. So much for that.

Wilcox's yarn is the best in the book, a really fine fantasy. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Here's a man that can write a pure fantasy and not poorly attempt one, as Wilstach does.

As regards the rest of the stories, those of Derleth, Francis and Chan stand out, with a special pat on the back for Lee Francis, for a yarn that's really different.

Finlay, of course, is first among your illustrators, with Fuqua and Krupa tied for second place. All your other artists are tied.

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That's about all for now except for a parting request. Couldn't you possibly get a story by Nelson S. Bond? I doubt if I'll ever enjoy a story as much as his "When Freemen Shall Stand." Also, just keep those Finlay pics coming. I can never get enough of them.

GENE BREWSTER,
504 E. 162nd St.,
Bronx, N. Y.

Nelson S. Bond, it seems, is now a big shot radio writer. He does "Hot Copy" on Sundays. Also, he has graduated out of pulp class, and he rarely turns his talents to his old love. But we have his word that any time he gets the urge, we'll get first look at the manuscript. Finlay is in the army, but still does an occasional illustration. We have more coming in soon.—ED.

THEY ARE ALL WRONG!

Sirs:

I was much interested in George Foster's letter about the age of the Earth. Aren't both of you being rather skeptical about the opinions of men who have put years of study into the matter? Both your opinions seem to be based on a lot of ifs. That doesn't go in science. Oh, I know a lot of strong theories have been exploded, especially those of chemistry we still believed in ten years ago. Until scientific theories are exploded, though, don't you think we ought to accept them in preference to other ideas, Ed.?

BOB SULLY,
U. S. A.

Putting years of study into a subject doesn't make your resulting theory correct. Your editor put years into learning German, and on his final examination, rated .41! Today we think "auf weidersehen" means "this coming Wednesday." As a matter of fact, no scientist has definitely proven a single point concerning the age of the Earth—yet today most scientists accept the rather absurd theory that the mountains of the Earth are millions of years old, but that Man is only a matter of thousands (referring to civilized man capable of building great cities). And yet there is certain proof that some ancient ruined cities (notably those in the valley of Mexico) were built before the mountains rose about them to cut them off from the sea. These ruined cities are covered by the sort of debris that can be deposited in no other way than by a tidal wave, a cataclysm. Yet the ruins are totally surrounded by mountains 14,000 feet high!

You see, when we published that article, we did in tolerance to yet another "opinion." As far as your editors are concerned, we think all of them are "all wet." The main trouble is that one man studies stones, the other, Man's remains, and yet another, chemical actions—and all three arrive at a chronology so widely at variance that it is ridiculous. Why don't they get together—and in that way, at least arrive at some sort of a common de-

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nominator?

No, we do not think that "theory" should be accepted until it is exploded. If you were accused of murder, would you accept death (the penalty of murder in some cases) in the electric chair UNTIL you were proven innocent?—ED.

FIVE DOUBLE A

Sirs:

Your April 1945 issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is the best I've ever read. All the stories rate at least A according to my system (C, not so hot—B, fair—A, good—AA, super excellent) and five rate AA.

1. "Escape from Doom"—AA.
2. "The Conqueror"—AA.
3. "The Singing Skulls"—AA.
4. "All Kinds of People"—AA.
5. "Lefty Feep Gets Henpecked"—AA.
6. All others tied for 6th with A.

I like Lefty Feep. He, I think, is the jerk's jerk, if you get what I mean. Tell Bloch that he'd better have plenty of "Lefty" stories or else!

By the way, how is Bloch's name pronounced? Block or Blotch?

Incidentally, I like your features, both in FA and AS. I think they are what make the magazine, not counting the stories, of course.

WILLIAM R. RENNAGEL,
Eden, N. Y.

The name is pronounced Block, and Lefty is a chip off the old.—ED.

THE OLD HOME TOWN

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for several years and have enjoyed every issue. I have always liked all kinds of stories so I can truthfully say I have yet to find a story in FA which I did not like. I can't very well rate special stories as the best because I enjoy them all.

I am now reading the January issue and one of the stories "The Cannonball Road" is what prompted me to write. It mentioned several towns with which I am familiar including Morristown, N. J., which is my home town. It really gave me great pleasure to run across my home town in print when I am so far away from it.

DANIEL M. HILL,
Military Secret,
U. S. A.

Yes, it does give one a kick, doesn't it? We believe it's best for a writer to write of the things and places that he is acquainted with. It not only helps to make the story more credible, but it gives all of us a chance once in a while to really get into the story ourselves.

This letter concludes the Reader's Page for this issue, and we hope you have as much fun reading it as we have writing it. When we do this department, we don't feel like editors at all, but like a member of the gang—and it's a great gang! Write again.—ED.

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SOMETHING SIMPLE FOR THE SCIENTISTS!

By WAYNE HARRIS

CAN your scalp pass the fingernail test? Do you have dandruff? Advertisements persistently want to know and the answer is usually "No" and "Yes." Dermatologists estimate that dandruff attacks 75 to 95 percent of American scalps.

Is this puzzling and persistent nuisance a forerunner of baldness? Is it a more or less normal condition, or is it an infectious disease?

There is a disease known as "seborrhea dermatitis," in which a discharge from the infected seboceous glands collects in thick scales on the scalp, produces sores, itchiness and even baldness. There is also a "sticky" type of dandruff, in which the dandruff scales are moistened by an oily scale condition.

Seborrhea is a matter for the doctor. But only two tenths of one percent of the people ever have it.

Of the several forms of dandruff, the only widely prevalent one is that which the doctors call "simple dandruff." The untidy little white flakes that shower upon almost everybody's coat collar are dried bits of scalp. Simple dandruff is a continual flaking of the top layer of the skin.

Medical researchers are as baffled over the true cause of this excessive flakiness as they are over the deeper mysteries of the common cold. Common suspects are rich food, excessive use of tobacco and alcohol, lack of sleep, overexertion and nervous strain.

What can one do to check the shower of scalp flakes? "If you find signs of dryness or loose, ugly dandruff when scratching your head" you need THIS NEW Formula or "THIS NEW Shampoo reveals the true natural beauty of your hair the very first time you use it—leaves it shimmering with glorious dancing highlights and carries away unsightly loose dandruff like magic."

These are a few of the well advertised tonics and shampoos but doctors say dandruff cannot be cured.

Will massaging and brushing help? Massage—manipulating, not rubbing—stimulates the scalp but does not remove dandruff. Like all personal hygiene, dandruff control is a lifetime job.

Keep away from the "unlicensed" scalp specialists. Never use any scalp medication that a doctor prescribed for someone else. It may be harmful for your type of scalp.

The statistical odds are 50 to one that you'll never have any scalp condition that calls for a doctor's attention, so you need not worry too much about dandruff.

But here's one for the scientists to solve. Something simple?

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THE GREENHOUSE FACTORY

★ ★ ★

VICTORY gardens may be quite the fashion for city folks these days but there is promise in the air when you can go down to a little truck garden in the basement and pick your own fresh greens and vegetables for dinner.

In government experimental stations, in practically every agricultural college, in the Bureau of Plant Industry, plant physiologists today are growing full quality foods and flowers without a vestige of soil. Imagine a tomato plant 25 feet high, with fruit from one end to the other—the whole growing on nothing more than a three-inch layer of excelsior and sawdust suspended on a wire mesh over a shallow pan of water.

Years ago it was understood that soil is simply a medium from which plants extract chemicals; that if the necessary chemicals were made available to plant roots by some other means than soil, the results were just as good.

It was not until World War I that investigation speeded up. The two branches of research that unfolded were: sand culture and water culture. The sand culturists placed their plants in clean, washed sand and flooded the beds with solutions containing feeding chemicals. The water culturists laid mats of excelsior, sawdust or practically any porous and absorbent material on wire meshes over pans of nutrient solutions so that the plant roots could dangle in the feedbox.

Professor F. W. Gericke, associate plant physiologist of the University of California, also foremost water culturist, laid electric heating cables in his solution tanks, dissolving the chemicals at a carefully accelerated pace and—produced the miracle. Gericke tobacco climbed 20 feet. Potato plants deposited hundreds of clean white tubers, and onions grew three deep. Yes, the plant world was literally on a spree.

Ordinary potato growers on the farm secure 120 bushels to a crop, however, Gericke potatoes made an acre crop of 2,465 bushels.

Sand culture, too, has its miracles. At the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Dr. Robbins has cotton plants with beautiful bolls growing in small pots of pure sand. In England, a dairy group was sprouting corn in cabinets, drawing out each day a shelf of fodder and replanting for the next crop to come along in just ten days.

This new chemical agriculture is more than a laboratory freak. The chemicals are cheap and little water is needed. Professor Gericke states that in the growing of grain the chemical cropper cannot compete with the farmer. The first assault on established agriculture will be a tentative one upon truck gardeners. And many truck gardeners are already in the routine hothouse business and so are ready to take over the new development.—*C. S. Rice.*

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LATEST OF THE MIRACULOUS "SULFAS"

AMERICAN doctors and health men have launched a mass attack against some of the deadliest of mankind's microbe enemies. Their weapon is sulfadiazine, fourth in the recent parade of sulfa miracles, and most amazing of all against the coccus microbes of pneumonia, meningitis, blood poisoning, peritonitis and gas gangrene, sulfadiazine is so effective that it is blessed in nearly all of America's forty million homes.

In the early 1930's certain German chemists developed prontosil, a chemical compound which proved effective in blood poisoning. French Scientists, taking prontosil apart, found in 1936 that its potency was due to only one of its ingredients, a substance called sulfanilamide. Trying out various combinations of sulfanilamide and other chemicals, the chemists two years later happened upon lifesaving sulfapyridine. Sulfapyridine proved to be a beneficent blitz against pneumonia, yet caused terrific nausea.

But the sulfa-chemists were undaunted. They burned midnight electricity in hundreds of laboratories. By 1940 they'd given the doctors sulfathiazole. Fully as powerful as sulfapyridine against pneumonia, yet the skin of many a sufferer broke out in horrid bumps and rashes.

Now the spotlight turned upon Richard O. Roblin, Jr., and his co-workers who, in the American Cyanamid Company's research laboratories at Stanford, Connecticut, were trying out hundreds of different sulfa combinations. In April 1940, after months of epic stewings, a strange mongrel sulfa . . . part sulfa, part vitamin, was created. They had produced hardly more than a whiff of this pure chemical, far less in weight than a lump of sugar. But they gave it a name, Sulfadiazine.

Cyanamid's research chief put this negligible whisper of white powder into the hands of the company's microbe hunters. They tried it out on mice threatened with assorted microbic doom. Mouse-wise, this sulfadiazine proved a wow. The microbe hunters now jumped their testing to rats, dogs, and monkeys. The results seemed too good to be true.

But a thousand hopes, dashed by disaster, have conditioned the minds of the microbe hunters to be cautious about jumping their reasoning from animals to men. Mice do not get rashes or drug fever, they are not known to vomit; and they don't go crazy and jump out of windows.

However, this drug has been classified as a powerful lifesaving weapon after testing sulfadiazine on animals as well as a great many patients.

Now we need not Praise the Lord to Pass the Ammunition, but we can give thanks to sulfadiazine, for in the coming generations these millions need not die.—*Joe Manners.*

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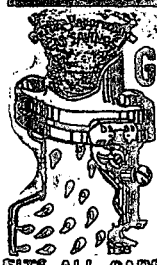

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It has long been my opinion that the knowledge of Atlantis and Lemuria is divided among thousands of people.

Like a giant Jig-Saw Puzzle everyone has one piece but no contact with the people who know of or have the missing links.

It is time that those of you who possess knowledge of these two great continents be brought together that you may correspond and solve the mystery that surrounds Atlantis and Lemuria and here is my plan.

If you think this is a good idea then sit right down and write a letter, telling me of your discoveries and opinions, submit any evidence you have on the subject, whether it be psychic, racial memory, fact or what have you.

This ad will appear only once and if I get enough response, I in turn will publish a Monthly bulletin which will contain my findings, your questions, interpretations, etc.

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HIGH! OCTANE GAS

IN SEPTEMBER, 1941, when the American Chemical Society met at Atlantic City, Dr. Thomas Midgley, Jr., received the Society's greatest honor—the Priestley medal. Rather than making an acceptance speech, Dr. Midgley turned to a one cylinder gasoline engine at his side. One of the two glass fuel tanks held a water-clear gasoline, the other contained a reddish mixture. The motor was started on the colorless fuel and soon a "ping, ping, ping" sounded so sharp that people present fought an urge to reach for the gear shift. The tinted liquid was then fed to the engine and the knocking stopped, and it purred like a kitten. Dr. Midgley had demonstrated his greatest accomplishment—the use of tetraethyl lead to keep an engine happy.

In 1922, Dr. Midgley solved the first mystery of engine knock. Miles per gallon have increased 20 percent, and the amount of petroleum needed to make America's motor fuel has been cut in half.

Thanks to what is virtually a new fuel, planes today fly 400 miles an hour and better, climb a vertical mile in one minute, and carry heavy loads more than 3500 miles.

No one suspected that fuel was the villain for the mystery knocking of an engine. Noting that when gasoline was used instead of kerosene the knocking ceased, Midgley became convinced that knocks were caused by the fuel.

In order to prove his theory, he wanted to see the explosion itself. By boring a two-inch hole in the side of the combustion chamber and setting in a pane of quartz, Midgley watched the play of flame through the peephole. When the engine ran evenly on gasoline the flame was blue; when it knocked on kerosene the flame was white. He thought that a dark color added to the kerosene might absorb more heat and do away with the knock. So he requisitioned the stockroom for oil-soluble dyes. But there weren't any and the stockroom chemist suggested that he try iodine. This was a miraculous choice. Iodine dropped into the kerosene made it a reddish purple color. However, when he fed this to the engine the knocking stopped.

After trying soluble dyes, it was found that color itself had no effect upon knocking. It was some peculiar property of iodine that had done the trick. But iodine was too expensive for commercial use. Midgley performed some 1500 experiments and at last he tried a fuel containing a few drops of a compound made from lead and alcohol, called tetraethyl lead. It was the best antiknock agent they had found and its ingredients were abundant and cheap.

But while this new fluid stopped knocks, the lead oxide which remained after it burned was bad for the engine. Bromine worked out well, but the supply from brine wells was only a fraction of what would be needed. The Midgley

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forces spent a month experimenting at sea where there was an inexhaustible source of bromine. This group then teamed up with the Dow Chemical Company to build a plant at Wilmington, N. C., for mining the ocean.

Research proved that the new antiknock fuel would work in high-compression engines. But not even General Motors, which had fathered the research, would pioneer in changing its engine designs. New fuels and new motors had to travel hand-in-hand. The car with a motor too good for average gasoline would quickly get a black eye. Chrysler then broke the ice by bringing out the high-compression "Red Head" and stamped on the cap of the gas tank, "Use Ethyl Gas." Soon the race between better fuel and engines began.

In 1930, Eugene Houdry, a Frenchman, found that when vaporized gasoline was passed through fuller's earth its molecular structure was altered and high-octane fuel resulted.

Superfuels now being made in laboratories in eyedropper quantities may be small for all present standards of motor performance. Technical men generally agree that in every gallon of gasoline there is a theoretical 250 miles of travel.

THE PLEASANT DENTIST

IN a majority of the cases, the visitor to the dentist is so scared before he even gets into the chair that even the slightest touch by the dentist makes him wince with pain.

Many dentists have tried their own pet theories on how to soothe their patients but none have used the ingenuity and gone to such extremes as Dr. Thomas V. Connor of Dallas. In fact, a visit to Dr. Connor is just like spending a quiet afternoon with a friend, for he has devised many gadgets to keep his patient's mind free from fear.

The door to the reception room is opened automatically by the patient as he steps from the elevator on to an air-pressure device. The reception room is furnished with comfortable bamboo furniture and on the wall hangs a ten foot bas-relief of a Korean mountain scene. The room is air-conditioned to keep the patient from "getting hot under the collar" and subdued fluorescent lighting further quiets him.

While the patient waits he can play up to twenty records of waltzes and other soft music free of charge by operating the control of the office juke box. Moreover, the patient can play any of these records while his tooth is being filled or extracted since there is an outlet in each of the three operating rooms.

But as the final touch, Dr. Connor makes use of his ability as an amateur magician to make coins, balls and even some of his dental tools disappear and reappear while he works to further take the patient's mind off his "ordeal." All of these gadgets have gained nationwide attention for Dr. Connor and you may be sure he has plenty of patients, that is, if he's not in the Army or Navy by the time you read this.—*Pete Bogg.*

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STORIES of the STARS

By HENRY GADE

Gemini

Life on the planets circling the multiple suns of Gemini, Castor and Pollux, would be complicated beyond imagining

(See Back Cover)

ARTIST FRANK R. PAUL'S colorful painting on our back cover this issue is another in this series of astronomical stories, depicting the double stars of the Constellation Gemini (The Twins). In his painting, Mr. Paul has shown the two suns, Castor and Pollux, to be double suns, which is an optical illusion. Actually this system, as shown on actual photographs, is composed of a triple star (Castor) and a single star (Pollux). One of the members of the Castor group is quite a distance away from the other two, and gives the appearance of two double stars, when viewed with Pollux. Actually, the third unit of the Castor triple-star is four and one half light years away from Pollux. However, we do have the weird scene that artist Paul has depicted in his painting, that of four suns in the sky at once.

Scientifically speaking, Gemini is the fourth of the zodiacal constellations, now lying mostly in the sign of Cancer. It contains the summer solstitial point, the point where the sun turns from its northern motion to its southern in the summer. At present it is about 2° west and a little north of the star Eta. Gemini lies northeast of Orion and southeast of Auriga, and is sufficiently characterized by the two stars Alpha and Beta, which mark the heads of the twins. The southern one; Beta (Pollux) is now the brighter; but Alpha (Castor) is much more interesting, being triple (easily seen with a small telescope). The feet of the Twins are marked by the third-magnitude stars Gamma and Mu, some 10° east of Zeta Tauri.

Mythologically speaking, Castor and Pollux were the sons of Jupiter by Leda, and Roman mythology especially is full of legends relating to them. Macaulay's ballad, "The Battle of Lake Regillus," concerns their victory in the battle for Rome. They were regarded as special patrons of the sailor, who relied much on their protection against the evil powers of Orion and Hyades.

Now, theoretically speaking, let's take a trip to one of the planets which may be circling these multiple stars.

Although these are giant suns, much larger than our own dwarf sun, they would not appear as large in the heavens of our hypothetical planet. They would be much more distant. They would even appear to be smaller, but this would be compensated by the fact that all but one would be very much brighter than our sun. Thus, the net result would be that we find ourselves in a world where the daylight is bright indeed, and bright with several colors, although the net result would be very similar to our own sunlight except for an almost unnoticeable tinge of red, blue and yellow at different times of the day.

Two of the suns, the major units of Castor, would appear to be quite some distance apart, and the other two would appear closer together, but more distant except for the fact that the latter two would be variable to a greater extent, and sometimes appear as single suns, very far apart, depending on our imaginary planet's position in its orbit.

This orbit may be a complex affair, perhaps even weaving in a rather irregular eclipse around three of the suns and between the three and the fourth! This would result in the almost total elimination of what we know of as night. There would be very little darkness on our Geminian planet.

Perhaps, because of this, we might find that the inhabitants do not sleep as we do, for definite periods, but they may have a perpetual series of brief siestas or cat-naps at times of brightest sunlight, and therefore most enervating heat. We might find that the Geminian sleeps at the time of brightest daylight, rather than as we do, at the time of least light.

Because of these weird, disturbing influences on his life, the Geminian might be inclined to rather warlike activities which he would regard as a matter of his daily life. He would go out each "day" to do battle as a matter of fact, and these battles might be waged in erratic cycles, depending on the proximity of the four suns, and of the activity of sunspots on them, which throw out radioactive rays (cosmic rays?) which effect such things on Earth (as some investigators have suggested as the cause for war-periods in Earth's history).

Our Geminian planet would have a rather hectic climate, what with the extreme swiftness of temperature changes in its daily swing on its axis. We would find that rainstorms came up quickly, devastatingly, then vanished at the snap of a finger. We would find the Geminians residing in houses constructed to withstand constant deluges and windstorms. We would find the people themselves mostly traveling in caterpillar tank conveyances which were transportation and battle units at one and the same time. They would travel for only two reasons, to eat and to fight!

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LOOKING TOO FAR AHEAD

SPURRED by a need for cotton for the manufacture of rubber tires and equipment, the Japanese are rushing their five-year plan to make Java self-sufficient in fibrous material. Cotton is No. 1 on the list, and other important items are kapok and ramie.

Ramie is a substitute for jute, which, of course, is no longer available from British India. It is used to make the rough fiber sacks which serve as containers for sugar and other produce from Java's plantations. It is known that in some places the Japanese have planted entire tea plantations with ramie.

Dutch experts pointed out that ramie is most harmful to the soil. It was not clear what the Japanese meant when they spoke of self-sufficiency in kapok since nearly 95 per cent of pre-war production was exported. Probably kapok production will be reduced to the self-sufficiency level.

In Borneo a three-year goal of self-sufficiency has been announced. The Japanese intend to switch from rubber to rice-growing. Dutch experts pointed out that rubber is the most important source of income for the population of southeast Borneo and expressed belief that it may be impossible to maintain the population on rice-growing alone.—*Fran Miles.*

HOMEMADE SAFETY GLASS

THE present war has taught us that during an air raid, one of the greatest dangers to human life is the threat of flying glass.

To equip each and every home, store and office with safety glass is the ideal solution, but the cost is out of the means of most.

To solve this problem, chemists in this country have conducted innumerable experiments and made countless tests. Out of all this research has come a new product manufactured by Roxalin Flexible Finishes, Inc., Elizabeth, New Jersey, which they have named Roxaneal.

Roxaneal is a white, transparent liquid that is applied by painting it on the inside of a clean window. Although it will not prevent the glass from cracking during a bombing, it will keep the pieces in place and prevent the fragments from flying all around. It is also produced in a blackout type that prevents the light from being seen outside the building.

Once the Roxaneal is applied, the windows may still be washed by using a soap solution without reducing the effectiveness of the film. If one desires to remove the film, all that is required is a razor blade to peel it off or a solvent to wash it off.

Let us hope that America will never have to make use of this discovery, but if the worst comes, we will be prepared.—*A. Morris.*

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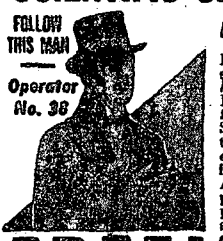

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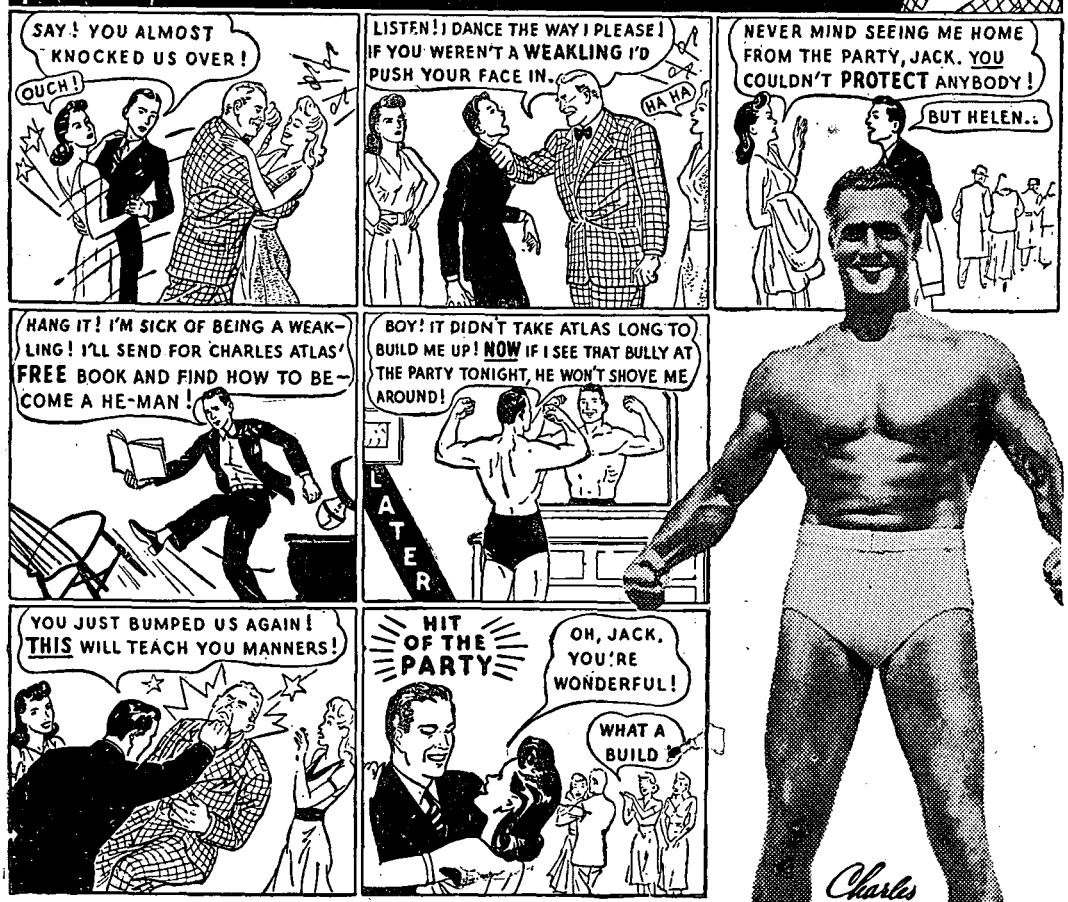
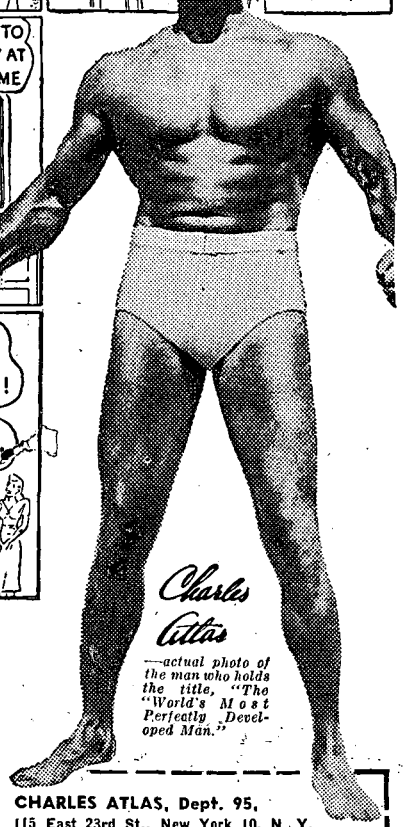
HOW "JACK THE WEAKLING" SLAUGHTERED THE "DANCE-FLOOR HOG"!





Charles Atlas

—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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Using *"Dynamic Tension"* only 15 minutes a day, in the privacy of your own room, you quickly begin to put on muscle, increase your chest measurements, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. This easy, NATURAL method will make you a finer specimen of REAL MANHOOD than you ever dreamed you could be!

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Almost before you realize it, you will notice a general "toning up" of your entire system! You will have *more pep*, bright eyes, clear head, real spring and zip in your step! You get sledge-hammer fists, a battering-ram punch—chest and back muscles so big they almost split your coat seams—ridges of solid stomach muscle—mighty legs that never get tired. You're a New Man!

FREE BOOK

Thousands of fellows have used my marvelous system. Read what they say —see how they looked before and after —in my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Send NOW for this book—*FREE*. It tells all about *"Dynamic Tension,"* shows you actual photos of men I've turned from puny weaklings into Atlas Champions. It tells how I can do the same for YOU. Don't put it off! Address me personally:

Charles Atlas, Dept. 95, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 95,
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I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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STORIES OF THE STARS . . . GEMIN

Four suns in the sky at once! That's the amazing sight yo
would see on a planet encircling Castor and Pollux, th
Heavenly Twins, in Gemini. For complete story, see page 20

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